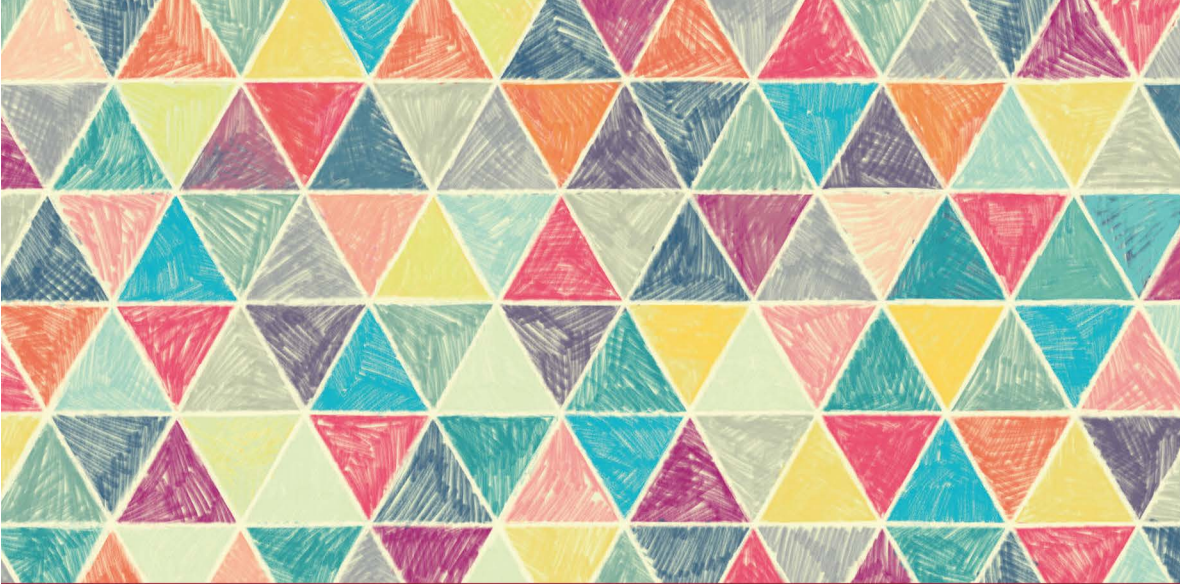




African Governance

THE POLITICS OF CONTEMPORARY ETHIOPIA

ETHNIC FEDERALISM AND AUTHORITARIAN SURVIVAL

Yohannes Gedamu



ROUTLEDGE





The Politics of Contemporary Ethiopia

This book investigates the role of ethnic federalism in Ethiopian politics, reflecting on a long history of division between the country's political elites. The book argues that these patterns have enabled the resilience and survival of authoritarianism in the country, and have led to the failure of democratization.

Ethnic conflict in Ethiopia stretches back to the country's imperial history. Competing nationalisms begin to emerge towards the end of the imperial era, but were formalized by the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) from the 1990s onwards. Under the EPRDF, ethnicity and language classifications formed the main organizing principles for political parties and organizations, and the country's new federal arrangement was also designed along ethnic fault lines. This book argues that this ethnic federal arrangement, and the continuation of an elite political culture, are major factors in explaining the continuation of authoritarianism in Ethiopia.

Focusing largely on the last 28 years under the EPRDF and on the political changes of the last few years, but also stretching back to historical narratives of ethnic grievances and division, this book is an important guide to the ethnic politics of Ethiopia and will be of interest to researchers of African politics, authoritarianism, and ethnic conflict.

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Ethnic Federalism and Authoritarian Survival
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The Politics of Contemporary Ethiopia

Ethnic Federalism and Authoritarian Survival

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**For Seble,
&
for Yovel, Leah, and Raphael**



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Abbreviations

ADLI	agricultural development-led industrialization
ADP	Amhara Democratic Party
ANDM	Amhara National Democratic Movement
CUD	Coalition for Unity and Democracy
EBC	Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation
EFFORT	Endowment Fund for the Rehabilitation of Tigray
EHRC	Ethiopian Human Rights Commission
EPCO	Ethiopian Electric Power Corporation
EPDM	Ethiopian People's Democratic Movement
EPLF	Eritrean People's Liberation Front
EPRDF	Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front
EPRP	Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party
ESAT	Ethiopian Satellite Television and Radio
ETC	Ethiopian Telecommunications Corporation
ETV	Ethiopian Television
FDRE	The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia
GTPs	Growth and Transformation Plans
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MEISON	<i>Melaw Ethiopia Socialist Niqnaqe</i> (All-Ethiopia Socialist Movement)
MetEC	Metals and Engineering Corporation
NAMA	National Movement of Amhara
NEBE	National Election Board of Ethiopia
ODP	Oromo Democratic Party
OLF	Oromo Liberation Front
ONC	Oromo National Congress
ONLF	Ogaden National Liberation Front
OPDO	Oromo People's Democratic Organization
PASDEP	Plan for Accelerated and Sustained Development to End Poverty
PP	Prosperity Party
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SEPDM	Southern Ethiopian People's Democratic Movement

SDPRP	Sustainable Development and Poverty Reduction Program
TGE	Transitional Government of Ethiopia
TPLF	Tigray People's Liberation Front
UEDF	United Ethiopian Democratic Front
WPE	Workers' Party of Ethiopia

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Preface

As someone born in the last years of the military regime's political reign in Ethiopia, I have firsthand experience of the brutality of civil wars. In particular, for anyone who was raised across small towns just tens of kilometres away from the historic city of Gondar, witnessing the rebel movements of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (EPRP) and Ethiopian Democratic Union (EDU) was common. And that is without saying much about what I remember of the military regime in those years. During these tumultuous times, whatever levels of resources the country had were dedicated to the war effort; and the echoes of such a slogan – in Amharic, *Hulum neger wode tor ginbar* ("Everything to the war front") – still attest to it.

Some 30 years ago, in 1991, as the combined rebel forces of the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), the Ethiopian People's Democratic Movement (EPDM), and the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) were gaining ground against the military regime in Ethiopia, I was a second grader with many questions. Even at this age, why my countrymen and women were fighting against each other was a question I had asked but had no received definite answers for. As I grew up and moved from one town to another and one school to another, I also realized that whatever we were learning in schools and what was being broadcast in the post-1991 media sphere were totally different. The reason was that, even as the country was being administered by the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), all the textbooks that we were using in our schools were still the same resources that our preceding generation had used during the era of the military regime.

As the vicious political cycle in Ethiopia continued, most of my generation has lived under authoritarian regimes, just like the last generations before us. And, without being told, we were cognizant of how we had to behave at any time, as asking the simplest of questions could get anyone in trouble. That did not deter the Ethiopian youth from seeking to understand what was going on in the country, however. Thanks to the frail and often censored and oppressed free press, we were learning what was going on in the country's politics. Even in the first few years of the EPRDF's tenure at the helm of political power, Ethiopians in different parts of the country were being displaced, and many massacres of ethnic minorities also occurred. Regardless, anti-regime

protests were not common, or, at least, limited purely to university students in the country's academic institutions in general, and Addis Ababa University (AAU) campuses in particular. As I grew up and travelled across Ethiopia, and especially after joining Addis Ababa University, most of the country's problems became clearer for me. From life in university dormitories to academic and political events in AAU campuses and in Addis Ababa, ethnic tensions in Ethiopia were indeed apparent even to people who do not pay close attention to political events.

I left Ethiopia without completing my undergraduate studies, though I was just only two semesters worth of courses away from graduation. As I continued my studies after many gap years, therefore, I renewed my interest in looking into the country's political challenges, and possibly contributing with scientific research – such as what I have attempted in this book. This work, a significant part of which was written during my last years of graduate studies, in 2016 and 2017, is therefore one that I hope will shed light on what is happening in Ethiopia's contemporary politics. As the country has now entered a new political era, with the dissolution of the EPRDF and the fall of TPLF, it is incumbent upon the country's policy makers to understand what transpired in the prior years by reading works such as this and by genuinely examining their own personal and group experiences. This book therefore attempts to explain why the EPRDF was such a resilient political coalition that it survived for almost three decades against all the odds. In so doing, it gives in-depth attention to what had transpired under previous regimes that also administered the country firmly. Moreover, this book examines the political culture that defined elite interaction, investigates the institutional design and implementation of ethnic-federalism and how such an institutional framework enabled authoritarian survival, and looks into most of the EPRDF's political and economic programmes. Finally, it also presents the factors that led to the emergence of the political change in 2018, while discussing the opportunities and threats that could still exist for the Ethiopian state.

Although this work is primarily an example of political science scholarly output, it also looks into the political history of Ethiopia. It examines the last few political regimes of the country while outlining their similarities and differences, and discusses most of the consequential political events in contemporary Ethiopia. I doubt that it will answer every question that is “out there” about the country's politics, yet I have no doubt that it will help students of Ethiopian studies, policy makers, think tanks, journalists, and both academic and non-academic readers at large in understanding the contemporary politics of Ethiopia.

1 Introduction

Most sub-Saharan states have suffered from the legacies of colonialism and its discontents. The political administrations that succeeded the colonial regimes have become mostly authoritarian. Underdevelopment and the ensuing poverty remain some of the characterizing features of post-colonial sub-Saharan Africa. Most importantly, ethnic and religious conflicts and brutal civil wars continue to present grim challenges. On a positive note, however, the abundance of diversity and cultural richness, the more or less analogous paths in terms of the history of state formation, the untapped resources and opportunities, and societal norms in the greater region also make the countries broadly comparable. This does not also mean that anomalous historical attributes that could define and explain a certain sub-Saharan African state more than another are non-existent. For instance, looking at the evolution of the modern state of Ethiopia, one finds a state that maintained its independence from colonial rule after defeating and surviving imperial Italy's historically ambitious attempt to create a large colonial empire in the eastern part of Africa. Such a historical reality indeed requires those studying sub-Saharan African states to be mindful of various possible idiosyncrasies requiring different research approaches and methodologies.

Regardless of the particularities mentioned above, however, the prospects of witnessing successful cases of political development in sub-Saharan Africa remain limited, and present several challenges to the study of the phenomenon. Moreover, the explanation for the continued presence of long-serving dictatorships, regardless of how much is written and said, remains a conundrum that fully deserves the attention of scholars in comparative politics. Attempting to further explore why such states fail to democratize and/or understanding how the political regimes in this part of Africa persistently survive the many challenges posed to their rule therefore remain essential questions. For the most part, however, it is also critical to note that most of the comparative research literature presents diverse reasons elucidating the failure of democratization attempts. Such attempts nonetheless fail to adequately explain the major factors behind most successful cases of authoritarian survival. Consequently, this work attempts to fill that gap by presenting some of the factors that have helped authoritarian survival, at least by focusing on the

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Ethiopian state. In this respect, it aims to contribute to our understanding of how authoritarian regimes preserve their hold on political power despite their ineffective governance and a steady increase in popular resentment at their rule. Moreover, this book closely examines the country's modern history and the political culture that defines modes of elite interaction. By looking into institutional designs such as federalism, this work also shows survivalist political settings proposed and created by the political elite. By doing so, it shows how elite choices and institutions both matter, in almost equal measure, with regard to pursuing a relevant course in research directions in comparative political studies.

As indicated, however, the fact that tackling such questions demands more resources, in conjunction with the presence of inadequate data availability, means that this work is limited to studying a single case study: Ethiopia. In doing so, it presents explanations of authoritarian survival from varied lenses and approaches that are primarily used in the study of the topic, while borrowing some from the democratization literature. This study, therefore, mostly in Part 2, questions how a minority ethnic clique with strong control of a political coalition could have a strong hold on the political, economic, military, and security might of the Ethiopian state; and how this political group was able to survive and retain its hold on political power despite grievances of political as well as economic exclusion on the part of the country's two major ethnic groups (the Oromo and Amhara, which constitute about 65 per cent of the Ethiopian population), as well as the country's other ethnic groups, remaining ever present. Indeed, such was Ethiopia's reality until the beginning of 2018. Hence, where Ethiopia is headed since the advent of the political change and the coming of the new prime minister, Abiy Ahmed, the possible prospects there might be for the peaceful coexistence of its citizens and groups, and what is at stake for the country's democratic aspirations – and how the political culture plays into these questions – will be explored at the end of the book.

Before delving deep into an effort to address the research question and studying the politics of the contemporary Ethiopian state, however, it is crucial to look at the three important and historically puzzling realities that do most to shape the debate on the question of assessing how authoritarian regimes (in the past or present) in the Ethiopian state survived the challenges to their political dominance in their particular periods of administration.

Factors to consider in the study of Ethiopian politics

First, the political landscape in Ethiopia today is a result of the historical making and unmaking of the state in a variety of different ways by different regimes that had control of political power in different political eras. As explained earlier, this fact holds regardless of the historic truth that the country is one of the relatively few states in the developing world that has never been administered by a colonial power in its entire history, which is a

reality that also means that the debate on the legacy of colonialism can be avoided altogether – at least when it comes to studying the case of Ethiopia in general, and in particular the 28 years that the authoritarian rule of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) survived. Hence, looking at other pervasive historical preludes of the state becomes crucial. The regime headed by Emperor Haile Selassie I ruled the country for over four decades until it was overthrown by the Dergue (a socialist military junta) in 1974. The Dergue's regime, which was mostly controlled and administered by the Workers' Party of Ethiopia (WPE), was itself overthrown in 1991, after ruling the country with an iron fist for 17 years. Here, it is crucial to examine how these regimes structured their governance, managed centre–periphery relations (relations between the regional states, also referred to as sub-states in the past, and the central government), and succeeded in remaining in power for an extended period. Researching and understanding the underlying reasons, and incorporating those cultural, institutional, economic, and strategic approaches that are relevant for identifying the causal explanations for the survival of such regimes in the longer term, will make a huge contribution to the study of Ethiopian politics overall.

Second, present-day Ethiopia, formally the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE), is a state featuring the institutional design of ethnic federalism as a form of government structure, which is anomalous in the context of other federal cases in sub-Saharan Africa and beyond. Accordingly, this book investigates the guiding principles behind the political and economic relationships between the regional states and the central government. The EPRDF-led regime, in power from 1991 to 2019, constituted the Ethiopian state by drawing linguistic and ethnic lines as a result of its desire to extend rights to many groups by promoting economic and political equality. In order to do so, elites in post-1991 Ethiopia started to implement their vision after accusing their predecessors of creating inequalities in the past.

Despite the existence of other African states with federal structures (Nigeria provides a good comparison), the Ethiopian experience remains an anomaly, mainly because its federal arrangement is devised chiefly along ethnic and linguistic lines or classifications, resulting in a clear departure from the old pan-Ethiopian unity pursued by the regimes that preceded the recent incumbents. Hence, understanding the broader ramifications – in terms of the consequences of having this type of federal arrangement – on the political survival of the EPRDF regime is significant for our knowledge of the contemporary politics of Ethiopia. Moreover, by adding to our wider understanding of the politics of federalism and the devolution of powers in a sub-Saharan African state such as Ethiopia we are also making a contribution to the field of comparative politics.

Third, Ethiopia's protracted civil wars, until the fall of the Dergue and the formation of a transitional council in 1991 with the coming to political power of the EPRDF coalition, will be examined as well. Given how such episodes of civil conflict shaped the course of events that followed, these historical eras

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are indeed worth investigating. The civil wars, which started during the 1960s and mostly ended in the early 1990s, involved a number of rebel organizations, representing many different ethnic grievances, all with their political causes for their struggles. For such rebel groups, exploiting ethnocentric agendas was extremely important for achieving recognition for the political grievances they embraced upon raising arms. Moreover, ethno-nationalist sentiments and causes were also found to be effective as organizing principles.

During the civil war eras, whereas some of the rebel organizations, such as the famed EPRP (Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party), fought to realize a pan-Ethiopian unity agenda along mostly socialist ideological lines, some others, such as the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), paid a huge price for their ultimately unsuccessful secessionist bids. The only exception among those advocating secession was the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF; it later became the Popular Front for Democracy and Justice: PFDJ), which accomplished its secessionist struggle with the establishment of the state of Eritrea (Iyob 1997). The commonality in most of these former rebel movements that waged armed struggle during the political eras prior to the 1990s was their ambition for the expansion of group rights and that of the realization of self-determination rights by ending what they wrongly termed "the domination of the Amhara" in every sphere of political and economic life in the historic Ethiopian state (Aalen 2006).

These rebel groups were also the ones that would later put their ethnic agenda ahead of broad-based national political interests when opportunities to take political power emerged in 1991. The groups and individual elites that inspired the formation of the rebellion forces of old had wanted all ethnic groups in the country to enjoy equal political representation and economic opportunities. For these groups, addressing such issues was a first priority that could legitimize their rule, limit potential opposition, and help solve the said historical questions of inequality. Adding to the commonality of these elites from the radical left-wing era, as most rebels and their subsequent organizations followed ideologies along the lines of socialism, the leaders of these groups had also once been part of the very active students' movement in the 1960s, which, among others, contributed to the downfall of the long-serving regime led by Emperor Haile Selassie I.

Indeed, these groups of individuals from the pre-EPRDF (pre-1991) political periods constantly debated the issue of identity and what they referred to as competing ethnic nationalisms and grievances, which they regarded as having been created as a result of the domination of all minorities in the country by what they saw as the mostly Amhara/Tigray-dominated political culture and the dominance of Amhara political elites (Gudina 2004).¹ Certainly, in light of the broader comparative politics literature on the recurrence of civil conflict, it is clear that the probability of a return to civil war is highly likely given the experience of a history of conflict.² The literature also asserts that, even though ethnic or religious fractionalization might not be blamed for the outbreak or recurrence of civil wars, in a situation when a

minority ethnic group dominates the political space, ethnic fractionalization could well serve as an explanation for the onset of civil war.³ This fact is also confirmed by recent literature putting the issue of “creed”, among others, as part of the overall explanation for the emergence of conflicts, as well as for the sustenance or duration of such wars (Zartman 2004). It is important to note that the aim here is not to discuss the causations or recurrences of the various conflicts the Ethiopian state has experienced in its contemporary history. Nevertheless, the reality that those who enjoyed their “turn” to rule Ethiopia between 1991 and 2018 came to the pinnacle of political power through a violent civil war necessitates the discussion of the issue at some point or other for its relevance in shaping our understanding of authoritarian survival in the country. Even the fact that the TPLF, as the last two chapters explain, opted to prepare for and wage war against the federal government after losing its power and dominance after almost three decades shows that old Ethiopian political habits die hard.

Therefore, even though these political organizations (primarily the OLF and TPLF) aspired to address political and economic inequalities by overthrowing the pan-unity authoritarian forces that were then in power, when their opportunity to rule arrived they ended up establishing a political coalition (the EPRDF) that served an ethnic minority liberation front that assembled the said coalition instead. Thus, the promises by political groups and their individual leaders to bring about a democratic Ethiopia became a terrible failure, which further perpetuated the cycle of violence, ethnic conflict, internal displacement of people, and tolerated corruption, reinforced by a clientelist pattern of elite interaction that eventually served the authoritarian survival agenda of the incumbent elites.⁴

Such realities of the recent past, and many others that this work touches upon, further make the question of possible democratic transition a debatable one and the issue of authoritarian survival in the Ethiopian state a complex one. In fact, following the collapse of the military socialist regime in 1991, many hoped that the transition that followed might usher in brighter prospects for democratic governance in the country. Unfortunately, in this pivotal period, the historic political and economic solutions put forth by the EPRDF coalition’s elites, introduced as designs to pave the road for the emergence of a democratic Ethiopia, failed to materialize. Instead, these institutional designs and programmes created political and economic winners and losers. Those who were perceived as historically powerful political groups, mostly Amhara, would be penalized for their past “perceived” successes. Meanwhile, the political groups that replaced them, especially the most dominant ones in the post-1991 transition, would become winners, viewing the wealth of the state as their reward for the struggles from the civil war era and for the sacrifices they had made during that period. Thus, the vicious cycle continued.

The solutions for power sharing that attempted to address the political inequalities in the realm of representation, as spearheaded by the EPRDF,

were presented in the form of the institutional design of ethnic federalism. The initial perception was that this could lead to considerable political stability by providing a much-needed interlude for leaving behind the tumultuous period of the civil war. Unfortunately, however, as the institutional design was implemented and became solidified over time, ethnic relations descended to an all-time low and the internal displacement of groups, violations of individuals' rights, and ethnic conflicts increased significantly. To reiterate: these solutions that were introduced in terms of institutional designs with expectations of answering the historical grievances of the various groups (formerly represented by the various ethnic rebels) failed terribly. Given the comprehensive failure of such institutional solutions, an effort to disentangle the prospects as well as the challenges of an arrangement such as ethnic federalism is critical. In this respect, given that the democratization process has failed in Ethiopia, and since researchers are therefore left endeavouring to understand the survival mechanisms of such a political regime in the country, the contribution of such institutional models for these questions of political survival has become a legitimate topic that this work sheds new light onto.

As is clear from the many instances of failed institutional models of federal arrangements, especially from notorious examples in the case of some former Soviet bloc states in eastern Europe, institutional solutions such as constituting a state along ethnic lines or ethno-nationalist narratives are mainly introduced to satisfy the ambitions of political elites for effective control of a state or advancing their core strategic interests (Majstorovic 1997). Moreover, for these elites, doing so creates a sense of stability while they attempt to address questions of political representation and grievances that arise from diverse groups within such states in ways that do not pose new challenges to their authority. Ultimately, across such regimes, elites are convinced that designing such frameworks is a critical step aiding their agenda of securing the level of political legitimacy they crave. Discovering whether similar goals were in mind when it comes to the Ethiopian case therefore becomes an essential question, which this book explores in much more detail, especially in Part 2.

Research purpose

This book serves two important purposes. First, it involves detailed study of the mechanisms for authoritarian survival in Ethiopia. In this regard, the research is structured in a way that helps us understand the overarching dynamics of various authoritarian regimes throughout Ethiopia's modern political history. Hence, by marrying the historical evolution of the state and past regime characteristics with the contemporary state of politics in the country, it attempts to present what is anomalous about Ethiopian politics in general.

In so doing, it is important first to look at the broad historical evolution of the modern Ethiopian state and the survival mechanisms utilized by each of the regimes in their efforts to keep hold of political power during

their respective eras in power. Despite the fact that the two political regimes studied here (the imperial regime under Haile Selassie I and the socialist military regime, the Dergue) are mostly different from each other on many important issues, the political culture (that explain patterns of elite interaction) under which their political rule was manifested was comparable in systematic ways. Such a political culture, as we will later see from different perspectives, was brought back into the political fold with the coming of the EPRDF-led regime, and remained embraced and further cultivated in unique ways to benefit the survival ambitions of those at the top of the political regime in power from 1991 to 2019. After the establishment of the Prosperity Party (PP), and once the EPRDF had been dissolved, some of the patterns of elite interaction continued, albeit differently, and this will be discussed in Chapter 11. Part 1 of the book, therefore, explains the ramifications of the political culture as well as the institutional designs of the prior political regimes and today's incumbents. In doing so, it puts greater emphasis on how such combined factors served the survival interests of the elites at the centre of political power in their respective political eras. Hence, the focus is mostly on the modern political history of Ethiopia.

Furthermore, it is important to note that, whenever this work invokes the concept of political culture, it is not primarily to frame it as the main causal explanation for the question of authoritarian survival. The persistence of political culture is an explanatory factor for elite interaction, however, and therefore should not be ignored. Moreover, although the continuity of the culture that defines elite interaction is an essential feature, the regimes in power in different eras also engaged in the remaking of the state in their shape and interests. Such a fact further necessitates the study of patterns of elite interaction as the foundation to our understanding of the institutional and strategic mechanisms that explain authoritarian survival in the case of past and contemporary Ethiopia.

The second, and more substantive, part of the book involves understanding the consequences of the institutional design of ethnic federalism and explains why the EPRDF coalition survived for almost three decades. Although this work extensively focuses on presenting Ethiopian politics before and after the arrival of the EPRDF on the political scene, it is mindful of recent political changes as well. Indeed, the last substantive chapter discusses the political changes that have swept Ethiopia since early 2018 and closely examines what happened in the two and a half years after the change led to the emergence of the current prime minister, Abiy Ahmed Ali.

In addition, Part 2 of the book presents important junctures of historical magnitude that shaped the current state of politics in the last two decades, while also indicating what to expect moving forward to the next period of challenges awaiting the Ethiopian state, in the chapter on conclusions and policy implications. Therefore, even though this work argues that the factors that led to democratic failures do not mostly explain authoritarian survival success stories, the research touches upon three important approaches in the

study of democratization to elucidate the mechanisms of authoritarian survival in Ethiopia, from the past to very recent times. Besides the political culture that defines elite interactions, it therefore assesses both the institutional solutions and the strategic interests of the rational political elite in the making of the causal analysis, detailing the contemporary politics of Ethiopia.

In sum, whereas the first part of the book mainly presents the political culture in the political history of elite interaction in the modern state of Ethiopia and the assessment of its ramifications towards contemporary realities, the second part focuses chiefly on the institutional design of ethnic federalism and the role of the political elite in cultivating and implementing creative political and economic mechanisms for survivalist agendas.

The research plan and methodology

The methodology employed in this book is qualitative in nature. Hence, it relies on comparative historical analysis across various regimes in the contemporary political history of Ethiopia. In the absence of real-time data and credible information that makes such research undertakings achievable, historical comparative analysis, which is making great advances in political science research, is therefore the most important avenue for scientific enquiry (Mahoney & Thelen 2015; Mahoney & Rueschemeyer 2003). In doing so, it identifies crucial points from history that have influenced the nature of authoritarian survival in the country by mostly discussing patterns of interaction among the political elite throughout the periods investigated. Such patterns of interaction have indeed persistently defined the course of politics in the country. Moreover, consistent with the historical analysis utilized, substantive chapters also provide discussion of a few case studies, further critical junctures that are vital to our understanding of authoritarian survival in Ethiopia. In addition, in both parts of the book, a great deal of information collected through extensive field research is presented. Throughout the fieldwork, which was conducted from January 2017 to July 2017, I interviewed more than 60 members of the political and intellectual elite, media professionals, former and current civil servants, and many others. The interviews were conducted mostly in person, though some were completed through telephone conversations and email exchanges.

The fieldwork took me to diverse sets of places in the United States and Europe, and some of the interviews were also conducted remotely with individuals who reside in Ethiopia. In line with the need to protect the identities of the interview subjects, and with my commitment to the individuals who participated in the interviews (and to uphold the guiding principles that I was trained to practise by the institutional review board of my alma mater, Georgia State University), which is important because of the understanding that some of the information could adversely impact their safety in view of the tense and charged atmosphere in Ethiopia prior to 2018, I have not included the names, or any personal information that could aid identification,

of the participants. Instead, information about when and where most of the interviews were conducted is given in the endnotes of each chapter. With the goals of understanding the research question explained from the outset, the chapters are therefore outlined as follows.

Chapter 1, the introduction, sets out the research questions, the purpose of the research, and the methodology used and presents brief overviews of what each subsequent chapter attempts to deliver. Before doing so, it also lays out the most important political and historical factors that are foundational for any student of Ethiopian politics to examine.

Chapter 2, entitled “Historical overview of political regimes in pre-1974 Ethiopia”, studies in detail important historical periods in Ethiopia, representing three different political regimes. The discussion starts with a review of successive regimes until the fall of the imperial regime led by Emperor Haile Selassie I (1930–1974). In doing so, it discusses important and widespread assertions describing the old Ethiopian state from the perspective of patrimonialism and neo-patrimonialism.

Chapter 3, entitled “The rise and fall of the military regime and the emergence of the TPLF-led EPRDF coalition”, discusses the socialist military regime known as the Dergue and the leadership of Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam (1974–1991). It goes on to look at how the penultimate political regime (from our perspective) came to be controlled by the EPRDF coalition in the post-1991 political period.

As explained above, these two chapters describe the many attributes of the political elites’ interactions and how they persisted across historical periods and contributed to shaping the political fortunes of contemporary Ethiopia. As argued earlier, all the regimes lack much resemblance to each other in terms of the ways their political systems were structured. The imperial regime under the leadership of Emperor Haile Selassie I relied more on semi-capitalist but seemingly feudalistic rule (though this is a subject for debate), whereas the Dergue, led by Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam, built upon a strong socialist party machine in imposing its authoritarian rule. Both regimes had recourse to the rhetoric of pan-Ethiopian unity, however, to subvert opposition voices, whether militarily organized or not. Apart from these appeals to Ethiopian unity, though, the level of political participation by and representation of citizens, as well as the economic policies in service of the national agenda, also varied greatly between these regimes. The political regime under the leadership of the EPRDF coalition was very different, and emerged as the antithesis to what had transpired in the decades of rule of the preceding regimes.

Chapter 4, titled “Authoritarian survival and ethnic federalism: the literature”, then starts to make sense of the literature on authoritarian survival and the institutional design of ethnic federalism. In doing so, it builds on the debates on authoritarian survival in contemporary comparative politics literature while keeping in mind how it relates to a sub-Saharan African context in general and the case of Ethiopia in particular. The chapter then reviews the federalism literature, with an emphasis on the debates focusing on ethnic

federal models and drawing on the experiences of those countries that have put ethnic identity at the centre of their political discourse and in the making of their political institutions.

The conceptual Chapter 5, entitled “The strategic elite and institutional designs in Ethiopia: the question of rights”, focuses on the theoretical explanations that Ethiopia’s contemporary political elite relied on to adopt the institutional design of ethnic federalism in the first place. Thus, it further analyses the strategic interests of the EPRDF coalition’s rational political elites and how they attempted to make sure that the delivery of political solutions to popular political and economic demands ensured their effective control of the state. Moreover, the chapter attempts to show how the elite used the debate on individual versus group rights in devising different forms of policy directions as well as their implementation, which eventually proved instrumental to the political survival goals of the very elite who devised the institutional frameworks, enabling the ruling elite’s effective control of the Ethiopian state for well over two decades. In addition, this section also focuses on how the solutions that were considered for alleviating the problems of political representation and economic equality among diverse groups in the country further derailed the growth of democracy in the country and, instead, ensured the regime’s political survival. Lastly, it also presents how the elite’s manoeuvring over economic reform plans focused on nothing but the political goals of the elites themselves. Chapter 5 concludes Part 1 of the book, which is mainly designed to provide the literature reviews, theoretical explanations, and historical foundations on which the overarching arguments are primarily based.

The first section in Part 2, Chapter 6, entitled “Ethiopia’s ethnic federalism: structural frameworks as mechanisms for authoritarian survival”, sets the tone for most of the discussion in this part of the book. In the post-1991 power sharing that emerged in Ethiopia, the previous rebel factions and their leadership constituted most of the new leadership in the emerging political elite in the country, and chose to restructure and shape the political system by devising a new federal structure along mostly ethnic and linguistic lines. In doing so, the new institutional structure created new autonomous regional states and bestowed the right to self-government on many ethnic groups, prioritized the promotion of group rights over individual ones, promised fair representation at the federal government level, and so on. These promises were never fulfilled, and most observers remain intrigued as to whether such reforms were designed to serve the interests of the political elite and extend their hold on political power. Accordingly, this chapter further investigates such failed promises.

Although the crucial contribution of Chapter 6 is the addition of important knowledge to the tenets of federalism and decentralization in a sub-Saharan state such as Ethiopia, the following variables are furthered explored and assessed in more detail in Chapter 7 of this research undertaking. The level of freedom the newly created regional states enjoyed in the last two decades and

half in terms of administrative autonomy (vis-à-vis their relations with the central government), electoral politics in regional states vis-à-vis the centre (the federal government), candidate selection mechanisms, and the assessment of the independence of bureaucratic systems more broadly are discussed and case studies presented. The emergence of new challenges and their impact on the regime's policies and the dysfunction that is the making of ethnic federalism in general are also discussed.

At the heart of such factors, Chapter 7, titled "Ethnic federalism and the EPRDF's systemic co-optation mechanisms for survival", also attempts to show the co-optation mechanisms of the ruling elite in the central government. Simply put, the book broadly examines federal-regional state relations from the perspective of a range of issues. In this regard, the main goal remains to understand how all such factors played out in reinforcing the EPRDF coalition's rule and ensured success in the elites' survival schemes. The methodology used focuses more on process tracing to help identify important trajectories. The elite interviews that were conducted played a very important role, however, in providing detailed insights across the issues and investigations presented in the chapter.

Chapter 8, entitled "The EPRDF, ethnic federalism, and the anatomy of a dominant-party state's economy", further continues the essentials presented in Part two. The chapter focuses on how the ethnic federal setting helped the political elite manipulate the economic programmes they envisaged and implemented. More broadly, it assesses post-1991 economic paradigms and policies in Ethiopia. The political elite in the Ethiopian government at first believed such policies and economic plans could serve national economic development aspirations as well as the promotion of diverse groups' rights towards economic equality. Nonetheless, despite recording reasonable rates of economic progress, Ethiopia continues to suffer from historic levels of economic inequality. Furthermore, the very institutional design of ethnic federalism, partly designed and perceived as aiding the success of such economic programmes, did nothing but serve as a ploy for authoritarian survival. The chapter therefore further investigates how these policies failed to deliver the economic opportunities that the people deserved, as well as attempting to identify and explain what has led to such failures as the policies were implemented in the newly arranged federal state of Ethiopia. The issue of property rights in the last couple of decades, the impact of an interventionist state-centred economy on individual and group rights, the state-controlled economic enterprises, and party-owned endowments will all be assessed more broadly and the impact of their contribution to the regime's political survival will be explored. Moreover, the growing role of the Ethiopian military in the economic sector will be examined in the context of how such schemes failed.

Chapter 9, entitled "Critical junctures in the rise and decline of the EPRDF", discusses the precarious challenges that the ruling coalition navigated through and survived for some 28 years, until it could not hold

itself together any longer. This is a key chapter, showing how the EPRDF successfully manipulated the state's institutions for its survival goals. In doing so, the chapter presents key historical episodes in the form of four political trajectories and explains how, in the end, the EPRDF could no longer play the politics of authoritarian survival in the effective manner it had previously.

Chapter 10, which is the last substantive chapter, entitled “A defunct EPRDF, the emergence of the Prosperity Party, and the fall of the TPLF”, then closely investigates recent political events over the last two and a half years, until the fall of the TPLF in late November 2020. The post-2019 changes transpired when an internal discord within the EPRDF coalition's four parties unravelled and a change in the ways in which the coalition conducts its political business emerged. Two important political factions (the Amhara and Oromo elites) of the EPRDF coalition chose different political paths that successfully challenged the dominance of TPLF, and these courageous moves eventually ushered in a new political era in the country. Consequently, there emerged a national political party known as the Prosperity Party, which became the most inclusive party in Ethiopia's recent history. The country's politics changed significantly. And that was primarily because the patterns of elite interaction were also transformed anew. Only time will tell how this development evolves in the future, however, so the chapter also looks forward to the challenges that await the country in the post-2020 political era.

Finally, in Chapter 11, “Conclusion”, the goals of the research are assessed and what the book has achieved in terms of contributing to the literature on authoritarian survival, the changes among political elites and their interactions, and how institutional settings in the post-TPLF and post-EPRDF era have been transformed, while also giving due attention to the limitations of the research. Moreover, it also explains how it contributes to the general understanding of Ethiopian politics from the past to today's politicians, policy makers, media professionals, political consultants, and academic and non-academic readers in general. Finally, it also considers the broader policy implications of the research and attempts to point out what “corrections” might be considered to turn the nation's recent journey into a formidable effort towards democratic governance and the breaking of the cycle in the patterns of authoritarian survival, given that the Ethiopian state is now going through unprecedented levels of political changes. Indeed, as the country continues to witness fierce political debates embedded in polarized ethnic politics, reflecting the rise of ethno-nationalism and competition between groups for resources and political influence, and intense elite rivalry across ethnic lines, this work suggests that serious attention regarding national reconciliation, revision of the federal arrangement, and the strengthening of national unity in ways that respect both group and individual rights needs to be considered.

Notes

- 1 In a short paper written by a student movement leader named Walelign Mekonnen (which can be accessed at <http://walelignfordemocracia.com/onationalqu.pdf>), we find an influential piece that instigated debates over political representation and inequality in the country in the 1960s.
- 2 For the recurrence of civil war in countries with a history of conflict, see Sambanis (2004) and Call (2012).
- 3 For more on the literature, see Fearon and Laitin (2003).
- 4 I have frequently used the phrase “political groups” to refer to political organizations formed in the service of grievances that, they believe, represent certain ethnic or group interests. This does not also mean, however, that each political organization with an ethnic name fully represents the demands, hopes, and aspirations of every common member of that group at large. Moreover, I have also used the same phrase to refer to ethnic groups themselves and the historical narratives that are on display, as touted and discussed by many in academia, politics, and the media.

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Part 1

The foundations to understanding the politics of Ethiopia



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2 Historical overview of political regimes in pre-1974 Ethiopia

The most appropriate way of looking into each important political era in the modern history of Ethiopia is to carefully study the evolution of political debates and contentious issues in order to learn the apposite lessons. Such efforts are critical in our articulation of possible theoretical foundations and causal explanations, and are also helpful in terms of future research undertakings. Throughout the presentation of such historical narratives, however, the political culture embedded in the Ethiopian state looms large. In this chapter, therefore, the political culture in the Ethiopian context is first investigated; and doing so also serves as an approach for looking at democratic failings, regardless of the unfair nature of any expectations, given the historical realities of the times examined. Most importantly, it is worth paying close attention to how the political elite in their respective eras were able to survive the challenges coming from voices of reform and critics alike.

The political culture in the Ethiopian context: the literature

In a movie titled *Imperfect Journey*, produced by Haile Gerima (see Woolford 1994), the story begins by showing a speech given by one of the former foreign ministers of Ethiopia, Ketema Yifru, to an audience of African foreign ministers at a meeting among dignitaries of member states of the old Organisation of African Unity (OAU). Yifru stated,

We started having *coups d'état* here and *coups d'état* there. A lieutenant taking over power here. And then you say to yourself, "What's going on?" A lieutenant, or a major, or a colonel, for that matter, replacing a certain leader, a colonel replacing "one leader" or some general replacing Nkrumah and then we had a major replacing Haile Selassie ... And so, here we are as if we have lost our compass, as if we have lost our objective, as if we have nothing to live for. And that is what really bothers a person like me, who was there from the beginning and is still alive to witness to what depth of this attitude that Africa has come through. What happened?¹

Unquestionably, regardless of the role played by Yifru at the time of his service to the country and the political regime that he was a part of, his words speak volumes about the political reality on the continent and in his country: Ethiopia. Whether it is the absence of institutions, the role of the strategic interest of the rational elite, or other approaches that look upon such questions very closely, learning the politics of sub-Saharan African states in general, and, primarily, the case of elite interaction in Ethiopia, is foundational to the broader understanding of authoritarian survival, regime change, and democratic progress, if any. Scholars who study Ethiopian politics have also paid a deserved level of attention to Ethiopia's political culture by going as far back as the beginning of the country's modern era (Levine 1965a; Donham 2001; Abbink 2000; Vaughan & Tronvoll 2003).

Sarah Vaughan and Kjetil Tronvoll (2003: 25) in particular, by relying on the argument that Donald Levin had previously stated, argue that the way to study the Ethiopian state in fact moves in the direction of seeking to understand questions "beyond the constitutional developments, and formal structures which provide the waxen form of politics in Ethiopia, to illuminate its 'golden' alternate [*sic*]: the relations and systems of power and convention which underpin and give it life and meaning".² The authors in fact were keenly interested in the complexities of understanding Ethiopian intellectual literary development, which most Ethiopians describe in the form of what is known as the "wax and gold" culture of their literature. In wax and gold, the meanings of writings on topics of anything Ethiopian are challenging. Some classic Ethiopian scholarly works tend to lack direct transparency through their secretive meanings underpinned in literary forms of the wax and gold tradition. In this literary tradition, messages are often coded, and require not only high-level fluency in the Amharic language but also the help of some experts in that tradition in solving some of the puzzles, which are out of reach to many who attempt to study Ethiopia, especially if they are not Ethiopian researchers. The wax and gold (*sem ena warq*, in Amharic) culture is what Donald Levine, a leading sociologist who studied Ethiopia, describes as "what constitutes the genius of Amhara culture" (Levine 1965b).³ Explaining the meaning and significance of wax and gold in studying Ethiopia, Levine states:

Sam-enna warq ("wax and gold") is the formula used by the Amhara to symbolize their favorite form of verse. It is a form built of two semantic layers. The apparent, figurative meaning of the words is called "wax"; their more or less hidden actual significance is the "gold." In its generic sense, the expression sam-enna warq refers to a number of poetic figures which embody this twofold meaning. The use of such figures distinguishes the Amhara equivalent of true poetry from ordinary verse, in which everyday language is merely embellished with rhyme and rhythm. In the genre known as *qene*, the original and more elegant kind of sam-enna

warq poetry, the lines are composed in Ge'ez and depend primarily on religious symbolism. But sam-enna warq constructions also appear in some types of secular verse in the vernacular Amharic and, indeed, at times inform Amharic conversation.

(Levine 1965b: 5)

Regardless of the challenges posed by coded language and secretiveness, scholars who study Ethiopian political culture, its foundational influence over the politics of old and current times, and how the elites interacted with each other have contributed to progress in Ethiopian studies.

In this respect, Paulos Milkias (2009) contends that the political culture is highly pervasive and far-reaching in Ethiopia, and is relevant for the identification of explanations for regime change and understanding the underlying workings of the exercise of political power among the elite. In making an analogy of how political culture is essential in this regard, Milkias states that “the divine right to rule that Haile Selassie I had put in place and his modernization of autocracy which was guided by an absolute monarchy was challenged when the clash between an archaic feudal system and a new political culture of modernization brought down the regime” (Milkias 2009: 677). The author further explains that what eventually replaced that regime was in fact another form of “subculture of junior military officers forming the *Dergue*, which was fundamentally authoritarian” (Milkias 2009: 677).

In addition to these historical underpinnings, contemporary Ethiopian politics even after the introduction of the ethnic federal arrangement remains similar to the old times. The “recognition” of age-old ethnic grievances and the larger emphasis given to group rights, the old ways of elite interaction based on loyalty, questions of ethnic identity and a history of conflict that defines inter-group relations, which are entrenched in the country’s political culture, are all still crucial. In fact, those who study the politics of ethnicity in Ethiopia point out that ethnicity and ethnic relations in the country are carbon copies of the political culture in the historic as well as political senses (Abbink 1997). Indeed, the politics of Ethiopia, as can be seen in later chapters, is deeply rooted in the debates centring on ethnicity, ethnic grievances, and issues concerning ethnic rights, giving way to ethnic nationalism in recent years. Our understanding of such questions thus will be aided by learning the political culture, which is easily identifiable in inter-ethnic relations as well as inter-elite interactions in the past and present. For instance, Jon Abbink, in the same article, by citing the definition of ethnicity by Claude Ake (1993), states that the concept of ethnicity in general implies “a cultural interpretation of descent and historical tradition by a group of people, as opposed to others, and expressed in a certain behavioral or cultural style” (Abbink 1997: 159). The African Studies Centre (Abbink 2010) also explains that the complexities in ethnic relations in the country, given the deep-rooted political culture and the apparent, even purposeful, lack of effort in correcting it, is the root cause for

the lack of prospects for democratization in the country, and what – ultimately – elucidates the survival of the TPLF-led EPRDF authoritarian regime from 1991 to 2019.⁴ The information sheet says:

The TPLF (which is the most dominant political party within the EPRDF coalition and the party that controls the security and intelligence apparatus of the state) saw the nationalities question (and not the issue of class) as the root cause of Ethiopia's political and economic problems in 1991 and took it as the basis of a new federal constitution that was ratified in December 1994. Ethnic identity or "nationality" was put above civic Ethiopian identity, and sovereignty was not placed in the Ethiopian people but in the various nations, nationalities and peoples. This innovative but obfuscating formula left the federal government in control of a largely non-negotiated political order. The concept of ethnic identity (in the dominant local language of Amharic, *behereseb*) was based on a combination of cultural, territorial and linguistic criteria that were largely inspired by Stalin's Marxist definition of nationalities.

(Abbink 2010: 1)

Indeed, the politics of ethnicity is so entrenched in the political culture that it remains very much explanatory of the old and contemporary. Likewise, Merera Gudina (2010), an Ethiopian political scientist and an opposition politician, argues that the historical narratives employed to assist our understanding of each political regime's and political elite's role in the makings and remaking of the state were nothing but "grand failures".⁵ Gudina's argument is true in a way, but also exaggerated, as there were significant gains that the country had made from the said culture as well. Regardless, this chapter not only attempts to present the political culture and challenges embedded in it – as that now seems a definition of where the country has come to – but also presents its discussions to indicate what is awaiting moving forward. Consequently, it depicts the cycle of the political circus in the Ethiopian state.

The political culture: assessing historical narrative in Ethiopia

In any comprehensive attempt to study Ethiopia's history, the first task becomes how to subdivide the modern history of the country and how to identify the critical historical episodes. In particular, in the use of historical comparative study, attempts to draw causal explanations that explain different patterns and how such patterns might have influenced the evolution of the state across time are critical. After all, even the age of the nation's history has divided mainstream historians, as well as diverse sets of scholars who have looked at the Ethiopian state from different lenses. Teshale Tibebu, in a seminal work titled *The Making of Modern Ethiopia*, says that "it is more customary to cite three possible times scales for Ethiopian history: (1) Ethiopian history is 3000 years old; (2) it is 100 years old; (3) and it's 40 years old"

(Tibebu 1995: xii).⁶ Tibebu eventually explains that, instead of arguing over whether a certain stance is wrong or provides a better time frame than the other, it is vital to consider the values that each approach contributes to our further understanding of the case at hand,⁷ which is an admirable peace-making approach in general.

In this respect, the imperial regime under Haile Selassie I will be explored starting from the years that preceded the second Italian aggression against the country, in 1935. This is mainly because the first major attempt (a practical one, for that matter) in constitution writing in the country was accomplished during this period. The socialist regime that overthrew the imperial regime in 1974, with its unique legacy and contribution to recent political realities, also deserves a great deal of attention. Finally, the more recent political regime led by the EPRDF coalition from 1991 to 2018, which offered “the synthesis of the Ethiopian state formation”,⁸ helps our understanding of how the state evolved. A successful reading of those eras, however, cannot be achieved without also looking at a few previous regimes, as far back as the 1850s.

Utilizing a method of process tracing to learn from the different trajectories of Ethiopian history and identify some path-dependent scenarios therefore lays out the essential foundation on which to build the arguments in the second part of the book, which mostly focuses on ethnic federalism and the authoritarian survival strategies that the EPRDF coalition depended upon for extending its rule until 2019, and the lesson for what comes afterwards. Here, it is vital to note that asserting the existence of path-dependent realities does not fully indicate that a certain political actor might have always relied on previous political tactics. Going through this research, however, it becomes clear that each political regime’s political elite, despite carefully attempting to undo the past, have always fallen back on using similar political strategies to those from the past. In this regard, through a historical lens, this chapter also attempts to look at contemporary Ethiopian political discourse from cultural and institutional perspectives while marrying them into the strategic interests of the political elite across different political eras.

First, the continuity in Ethiopia’s political culture with regard to elites’ interaction and strategies outweighs every constructive attempt by new political elites and regimes. And such elites always faced difficulties as they vied to redefine the political discourse of a multi-ethnic state. Unlike experiences in most sub-Saharan African states that survived the sad legacies of colonialism (with, as a result, their political cultures being constructed in the process), the case in Ethiopia is very much different.⁹ In understanding the ever-present political culture in terms of the patterns of elite interaction witnessed in contemporary Ethiopia, we can see how the old patrimonial political culture evolved by closely looking at the three political eras that this chapter analyses throughout. Here, we find that the patrimonial political culture is what laid the foundations and paved the way for the emergence of the more recent neo-patrimonial clientelist state. Second, we see that, in the evolution of the Ethiopian state, the notion of ethnicity and competing ethnic interests remain

embedded in the political discourse. Third, the role of the intellectual elite in the country and its influence are insufficiently studied. The “most celebrated” Ethiopian student movement of the 1960s and the products of that generation also remain very influential to this day. Before attempting to explain each of them, however, it is crucial to understand the concepts of patrimonialism and neo-patrimonialism.

Concepts of patrimonialism and neo-patrimonialism

Most cultural theories of regimes of the patrimonialism and neo-patrimonialism types seek to explain the historical trajectories that laid the foundations for authoritarian survival strategies in the country today. It was Max Weber who first defined the concept of patrimonialism alongside another concept, patriarchalism (Weber 1978 [1922]). Whereas patriarchalism involves what Weber refers to “the individual who presides over the communal network of obligation and obedience” (Weber 1978 [1922]; 1007), with patrimonialism he finds that this individual could turn to his social cleavage, ethnicity, or kinship and/or loyalties among the ruling elite to form and enforce his rule.¹⁰ In his writings on “economy and society”, Weber explains that traditional patrimonial rule exists when a ruler considers political power as his private property.¹¹ For Victor Le Vine, such sources of “traditional roots” of political alliance are also critical in our study of political regimes on the African continent. According to him, this political culture is what paves the way for authoritarian leaders to go “beyond traditional limits of their political rule”, which, essentially, poses a threat to any initiation of a democratization process (Le Vine 1980: 659). Sadly, this is when we can infer that their “intent” on democratization goes awry and eventually influences them to think of ways that keep their political reign intact, becoming more important to them than the contributions they could leave to their society and state.

In further strengthening authoritarians’ ambitions for political survival, Guenther Roth (1968), who analyses Weber’s explanation of the concept of patrimonialism, also refers to patrimonial rulers as individuals who put maximum effort into increasing their grip on political power. Roth further argues that, when such leaders face fierce challenges that threaten their authority and control, they tend to “avail themselves of various political and administrative devices that transcend the bases of their legitimacy” (Roth 1968: 195). Gero Erdmann and Ulf Engel (2006) are also in agreement with Roth in that concepts of patrimonialism and neo-patrimonialism are in line with “Weber’s political sociology, which is based on domination and legitimacy” (Erdmann & Engel 2006: 7). In this respect, such patrimonial traditions and leaders’ quest for legitimacy are what determine how a leader attempts to shape his regime while eventually constraining the prospect of democratization in the process – given that his focus in affirming his rule wins out over all other priorities. Roth, who is known for his contributions in analysing many of

Weber's works, further argues that Ethiopian imperial regimes of the past are "the foremost example of traditionalist patrimonial regimes" (Roth 1968: 195–196).

It is clear that the concepts of patrimonialism highlighted above could be associated with the reigns of both Emperor Menelik II, who ruled Ethiopia between 1889 and 1913 and who is considered by the northern and central Ethiopian elites as the founding father of the modern state, and Emperor Haile Selassie I, whose reign lasted from 1930 to 1974 (although he served the state as a *de facto* leader for over a decade before his coronation). Of course, these leaders were crucial in laying out and strengthening the foundations of the Ethiopian state in addition to their historic roles in shaping the political future of the state after their wisdom in leadership kept the country's independence intact. By contrast, the penultimate regime, led by the EPRDF coalition, which came to power in 1991 by overthrowing the Dergue's socialist military regime, fits the theoretical explanations of a neo-patrimonial and clientelist regime. The concept of neo-patrimonialism, as per Erdmann and Engel's definition, reads as

[a] mixture of two, partly interwoven, types of domination that co-exist: namely, patrimonial and legal-rational bureaucratic domination. Under patrimonialism, all power relations between ruler and ruled, political as well as administrative relations, are personal relations; there is no differentiation between the private and the public realm. However, under neo-patrimonialism the distinction between the private and the public, at least formally, exists and is accepted, and public reference can be made to this distinction (it is a different matter whether this is observed or not). Neo-patrimonial rule takes place within the framework of, and with the claim to, legal-rational bureaucracy or "modern" stateness. Formal structures and rules do exist, although in practice, the separation of the private and public sphere is not always observed.

(Erdmann & Engel 2006: 18)

As can be seen from the above definition of the concept, the characteristics of neo-patrimonial regimes negatively influence the prospect of democratic efforts while also paving the road for the political elites' desire for survival by eliminating the lines between bureaucratic governance and the traditional markings of the state along ethnicity and political loyalties, which are the foundations for political legitimacy in the contemporary Ethiopian state. Moreover, they also show that, under the guise of political democracy, leaders with authoritarian tendencies can still rule the state with an iron fist. In this regard, Jonathan Hartlyn's definition of the concept as "a type of political regime with important within-type variations, which can crosscut authoritarianism and democracy (while constraining the latter)" (Hartlyn 1998: 6), shows that neo-patrimonialism allows a seemingly democratic regime feature that could effectively constrain a democratization process while validating the

elites' survival ambitions by permitting them to focus solely on serving their political, societal, and economic base.

Moreover, in line with the earlier mentioned argument on the legacy of a patrimonial past influencing present-day politics, Hartlyn further argues that neo-patrimonialism shows that "some kinds of political patterns can continue, and even be reinforced over time, in the absence of particular kinds of sustained social change or concerted effort by political leaders from above" (Hartlyn 1998: 6). Concurring with Hartlyn's argument, Michael Bratton and Nicolas van de Walle also argue that contemporaneous political transformation in states characterized by governments with neo-patrimonial-type regimes is mostly "conditioned by the mechanisms of rule embedded in ancient regimes" (Bratton & van de Walle 1994: 454). In the same way as with the definition of patrimonialism, and from the explanations by the authors above, we might deduce that political leaders in Ethiopia still impose their authoritarian rule; and that this is simply the continuation of the characteristics of previous authoritarian regimes in a newly minted neo-patrimonial fashion. The leaders accomplish this by exhibiting some democratic signs for the purpose of legitimizing their rule.¹²

In an attempt to identify the main characteristics of neo-patrimonial regimes, Nicolas van de Walle elaborates that clientelism (which is not to be confused with populism: van de Walle 2001: 274), citizens' access to state resources, how much power is centralized, and neo-patrimonialism as a regime type can all be considered as corrupt practices "that are legitimated by the view that clientelism serves a kind of community purpose rather than individual enrichment (van de Walle 2001: 118). As can be seen from van de Walle's measurements, it is possible to operationalize this regime type by virtue of many variables. We also see, however, that clientelism features in many scholarly works that study democratic attempts in neo-patrimonial regimes as well (Bratton & van de Walle 1994, 1997; van de Walle 2001, 2007; Hartlyn 1998; Médard 1992; Kitschelt & Wilkinson 2007).

Van de Walle, in his explanation of clientelism, which extensively features neo-patrimonial regimes, also argues that "clientelism is viewed as critical in countries with a tendency toward multiple ethnic and regional divisions, and in which few regimes can count on either a successful economy or electoral mandates for their legitimacy" (van de Walle 2001: 52). When we look at the Ethiopian state, which is home to highly diverse ethnic groups,¹³ it is apparent that the prevalence of clientelist relationships could adversely impact democratic consolidation efforts, in a way cementing the significance of survival strategies for the political elite. Moreover, in reference to the use of state wealth by patrimonial regimes in Africa, van de Walle also states that "clientelism is based on the extensive use of state resources for political purposes, and clientelist regimes almost inevitably produce highly interventionist economic policies" (van de Walle 2001: 9). Given such characteristics of a neo-patrimonial state (as we will see with my analysis of the current regime in Ethiopia later in the second part of the book), however, one can

see that, when an incumbent political party of a neo-patrimonial regime type (such as the EPRDF) considers the wealth of the state as its own, or forms businesses that the party top brass controls in addition to its political administrative duties and capacities, it further blurs the political space for opposition political parties and harms prospects for democratic initiatives and consolidation efforts. In concluding the importance of the patrimonial and neo-patrimonial political cultures and their significance to authoritarian survival schemes, Jean-François Médard's (2002) work attests that the reason for the neo-patrimonial regime's obsessive control of the economic and political resources of the state emanates from nothing but its sheer desire for political survival.

Short overview of political narratives in patrimonial Ethiopia (1855–1930)

The Ethiopian state in the eighteenth century and a large part of the nineteenth was highly fragmented, and power was concentrated in four regional political centres dominated by four different warlords, who had established quasi-sovereign states (Tibebu 1995). This period in the country's history is referred to as the “era of princes” (*zamana mesafint*, in Amharic), or even as the “era of warlords”, mainly because of the existence of these various strongmen at the head of various regions in the northern and central Ethiopian highlands. The arrival in the political realm of a warlord called Kassa Hailu, who defeated several of the warlords one after another and later crowned himself as the first “modern” emperor of the country, as Tewodros II (1855–1868), then changed the course of warlordism and laid the foundations for a strong Ethiopian state. Tewodros II's short reign brought a change of fortunes for the Ethiopian state and gave rise to a more centralized state-building project (Mekuria 1981).

The death of Tewodros II in 1868, after a battle against the British (who had come all the way to Ethiopia to free Europeans imprisoned by the king), then paved the way for the coming to power of Emperor Yohannes IV (1872–1889). After being crowned as the new king of kings, Yohannes IV added pace to the process of state formation with his declarations of the boundaries of the Ethiopian state and by further centralizing the territories under his control (Zewde 2002; Mekuria 1981). Indeed, both Tewodros II and Yohannes IV attempted to modernize the country's military, created formal diplomatic relations with European powers, and exerted strong control over the Ethiopian domestic political sphere.

There is a broad consensus, however, that it was Menelik II (who succeeded Yohannes IV) and Haile Selassie I (who succeeded Menelik II) who were the ones who not only strengthened the Ethiopian state in ways unseen in the past but also seized the opportunity to introduce the modern political structures that are critical to the process of institutionalizing a state that in prior eras had relied on primitive and manipulative political institutions. From the

introduction of a ministerial Cabinet to the writing of the first constitution of the Ethiopian state, Menelik II and Haile Selassie I were the ones who left bold imprints on the country's polity for those who followed. Tibebe summarizes the roles that the first four modern Ethiopian emperors played in the formation and modernization of the Ethiopian state as "emperor Tewodros II initiated, Yohannes IV elaborated, Menelik II consolidated, and Haile Selassie I completed the process of transformation from parcellized sovereignties to centralized sovereignty" (Tibebe 1995: 31).

Figures such as Tewodros II and Yohannes IV and their contributions to the political consolidation and modernization of the Ethiopian state cannot be ignored. The justification for starting historical analysis from Menelik II's reign depends on three reasons, however. First, Ethiopia assumed its current shape and form during his reign, as he reincorporated some forgotten or lost territories of that had been lost in battles three or four centuries earlier (see Hassen 2015). Second, he introduced many institutional and political reforms and encountered a wide range of challenges as a king of kings of Ethiopia in a very defining period in Ethiopian history. Third, and most importantly, Menelik II was probably the most famous Ethiopian ruler ever, as many in Ethiopia and the black world in general give him the credit for defeating Italian colonial ambitions at the famous Battle of Adwa in 1896.¹⁴

During the early decades of the modern era (from the late nineteenth century to the early twentieth) we see that the previously fragmented Ethiopian state achieved a centralized and stronger structure, with international recognition given to the efforts made by emperors in the second half of the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, whether they manage to create a political system that could entertain diverse group interests is debatable. As Zewde Gabre-Sellassie (1975: xiii, 334) notes in his political biography of Yohannes IV, both Tewodros II and Yohannes IV, as they attempted to centralize the Ethiopian state, persuaded local kings to remain administrators of their respective regimes. For instance, once Yohannes IV had asserted his rule as King of Kings of Ethiopia, he received the blessings as well as humility of King Tekle Haymanot of the province of Gojjam, while Menelik remained King of Shewa (in the central Ethiopian highlands, also encompassing the current capital of Ethiopia, Addis Ababa), accepting Yohannes IV's legitimacy as King of Kings of Ethiopia.

Nonetheless, the fact that the already centralized Ethiopian state added even more territories through Menelik II's state consolidation policy (once he had assumed political power after the death of Yohannes IV with the uninvited "help" of another external political dynamic, namely Sudanese Mahadist forces killing his predecessor), meant that the number, size, and diversity of ethnic groups in Ethiopia under his rule increased drastically. In this regard, the need to form a representative state structure that could accommodate the multi-ethnic Ethiopia that had emerged as a result of Menelik II's state consolidation policy and actions became readily apparent.

Fortunately, however, the era of Menelik II never witnessed ethnic rivalries to the extent that can be seen in Ethiopian politics today. Indeed, most influential politicians of the Menelik era were individuals from a wide variety of different groups. Their capabilities in constituting a strong political elite were the result of their military leadership abilities and their commitment to the emergence of a strong Ethiopian state. That being clear, the political royalty (elites) from the era and the political dealings and bargaining among themselves came about only on the basis of consensuses gained as a result of loyalties. It was the cultivation and development of such a system of governance, based on commitment to the Ethiopian state and mutual loyalties, that enabled Menelik's call to fight Italian aggression to end with an overwhelming defeat of the colonial aspirant at the Battle of Adwa in 1896.

Moreover, in the words of Bahru Zewde, once Ethiopia had assured itself of lasting independence after "it stemmed the tide of colonialism", this need to accommodate these diverse interests with a fair and balanced political system that respected the rights of the citizens in the newly incorporated territories became clearer (Zewde 1991: 84). Unfortunately, it seems as though Menelik's attempt to devise a strategy to create a modern and fair political system that could be representative of the several homogeneous territories was not accomplished as planned. Instead, As Zewde argues, Menelik II imported the historical traditional rules that had guided the relationship between the peasantry and the ruling class in northern and central Ethiopia into the newly incorporated territories of the south and south-west and some parts of the south-east. Hence, given that the northern Ethiopian highlands had institutional patterns that were somewhat more to the king's liking, this meant that the same institutional patterns had to be incorporated in the newly admitted and highly fractured southern political entities. That system, according to the author, is critical, since political power in Ethiopia was mainly explained by economic foundations such as "tribute and surplus labor", which are the most profound economic institutions, defining not just the previous regimes of the old medieval period in the country's history but even that of the era of the princes (Zewde 1991: 87).

Hence, tributes in the form of taxes immediately served the interests of the huge military, which had successfully protected the country's sovereignty against the colonial ambitions of an up-and-coming and aspiring European colonial power, Italy. Emperor Menelik II was not to blame, however, as most of the senior political elites around the king were not receptive to his call to introduce greater administrative freedom and rights to the newly conquered areas. Moreover, Menelik's success in empowering his administration's elites, as explained earlier, was not implemented by taking the ethnic or tribal identity of the elites into consideration; rather, it was their commitment to the emergence of a modern Ethiopian state and the maintenance of its independence.

Such political convictions indeed reinforced Menelik's strong efforts in empowering the military elites at the expense of some of the elites in

the reincorporated territories. After all, some of the elites from the newly consolidated territories had fought against Menelik's army, and thus it would have been persuasive to argue that they could not be trusted. As a result of his policies of empowering the military elite, which he considered loyal and deserving of political administrative duties on account of their leadership qualities and wisdom, some of the newly acquired territories therefore lost their political autonomy, apart from ones that did not challenge the emperor's invasion, by choosing to submit peacefully, and that had leaders with good negotiating skills that impressed the emperor. For the most part, however, the military commanders who had led Menelik's army in the fight against colonialism would become administrators of some of the newly reincorporated territories via the state consolidation campaigns.

Thus, a patrimonial political culture rewarding loyalty and kinship continued as the norm rather than the exception. Therefore, those who facilitated the new economic system, which Menelik adopted from the relatively developed north of the country and implemented across the reincorporated territories, became entrusted with leadership roles. In assessing how Menelik II addressed the questions of rights coming from these newly incorporated regions of the south and how some of them were deprived of their rights to self-administration and representation in the central government, only administrative or bureaucratic analysis was used. As an Ethiopia-focused historian, who has written extensively on the country's political history, Harold Marcus contends:

In some circumstances the emperor upheld the positions of rulers who voluntarily allowed their countries (traditional states) to be incorporated into the empire; in almost all cases, however, it was expected that such individuals would rapidly acquire the mannerisms and customs of the north. The very nature of new empire mitigated against regionalism, and the emperor also worked through the central government to weaken the powers of traditional provincial authorities. Whenever possible the emperor reduced the importance of hereditary lords; he preferred his appointees to be self-made men who were completely dependent upon the crown for their administrative posts.

(Marcus 1995: 2)

This was not because of the discriminatory policy of Menelik, however, though such policies emanated from his determination to establish an Ethiopian state with a strong central government able to withstand challenges that could come from what Marcus calls "regionalism at home". In addition, the fact that much of Africa was falling to European colonialists also signalled that a strong and united Ethiopia was the only way to survive. Here, one can see that Menelik's efforts to create a strong central government have mostly been criticized as the establishment of a state that crushed the southern ethnic groups and undermined their self-administration questions,

which is a major misunderstanding of the period's political history. Moreover, expecting Menelik II to be a democratic leader in that era – or many others who preceded the era, for that matter – also constitutes a historical analysis that is not congruent with a critical understanding of the era, not only from the Ethiopian historical perspective but from that of world history as a whole. Fortunately for the political legacy of Emperor Menelik II, however, historical analysis is not about what probably might have happened or should have happened, but about what actually happened. And what happened was that the country retained its independence by defeating Italy's colonial aggression and continuing to remain a beacon of freedom.

Although Menelik's actions might have disadvantaged the old elites of the reconquered territories from administering themselves, it is also important to mention that the emperor's administration was reminiscent of a modern form of federal structure, with local governments enjoying autonomy as a result of how he decentralized political power. Of course, it is important to point that neither the king nor the loyal ruling elite had an understanding of what the devolution of political power or federalism means in ways these terms are understood today. Regardless, a reformist Menelik had successfully attempted to provide some level of political autonomy for a few of the newly added territories that had submitted peacefully, with the Kingdom of Jimma and its king, Abba Jifar, being the prime example (Marcus 1995; Zewde 1991).

Menelik's actions thus strengthened the process of state formation started by his predecessors as well as consolidating modernization schemes for the Ethiopian state, especially at the centre, in Addis Ababa (with the amount of taxes being collected increasing rapidly). Nonetheless, Menelik II did not instil the roots of "democratization", as he did not create a genuine political system that would lead to the representation of diverse groups in his administrations throughout his reign. Luckily for him, he should not be blamed. Indeed, this political period, across many continents and countries, was not known for a wave of democratic development, but of colonialism and state making by force. Hence, using recent standards as a yardstick by which to measure Menelik II's leadership is unjust.

In fairness, however, if the question today is about whether Emperor Menelik II was able, in practical terms, to implement the ideals of democracy as the term is understood today, the answer would have to be that he did not. The state and its institutions that he managed to implant were in their infancy, and the broader understanding of the political elite from the era was that of imperial administration and not democracy as a type of government. Rather, we see that his brilliance lay in the tactics he used to impose his rule, which strengthened the state while ensuring the survival of the political elite that remained loyal to his throne, even though they also underpinned the survival strategies of the political elite in the periods that succeeded his era.

Whatever, Ethiopia's history of institutional development indeed started in this era. In the later years of his action-packed reign, Menelik II also succeeded

in creating a ministerial Cabinet for the first time in the country's modern political history, which was lauded as an effort that could lead to the possible representation of various ethnic groups' voices in the government – though to assert that it was not completely representative would also be a disservice to history, as it is extremely difficult to organize a Cabinet by appointing individuals from newly acquired territories with no experience of political activity or governing at a central government level. Moreover, some of the elites that became part of the Cabinet were also Oromo Ethiopians. Nonetheless, the Cabinet, and its work too, had little real success, the whole purpose behind its formation being, essentially, to identify Menelik's successor and arrange the succession plans, given his deteriorating health. This was done in line with the advice given by some Western diplomats and a few educated members of the political elite, including intellectuals from the Orthodox Christian clergy (Marcus 1995).

What makes Menelik's reign over the Ethiopian state patrimonial, however, was that it depended on loyalties, kinship, and alliance formation to maintain his rule. In this way, Menelik also ensured the continuing influence of his close circle, which served him and the state well, from defeating a colonial power to aiding the ever-consolidating Ethiopian state. Such patrimonial political rule, dependent on loyalties, was in fact the reason behind the problems that emerged when the need to arrange succession plans became apparent, and the Cabinet that he had created and its role in aiding a successful political transition failed, resulting in divisions among the political elite. The fact that the emperor's wife, Empress Taytu Bitul, had become a very influential political figure who posed a real threat to the ruling elite, and the fact that her husband considered her untouchable while at the peak of his political power in his last years, showed how the patrimonial political culture was in a shambles once Menelik's time on the throne ultimately approached its end. The political infighting among the elite and Empress Taytu was notably tense. According to historian Bahru Zewde, Taytu's political manoeuvres, which transpired mainly through marriage alliances, were also critical to her "matrimonial politics" (Zewde 1991: 120). The influence of the ruling elite, considered his close circle, finally overcame Empress Taytu's challenge, however, enabling the successor who Menelik had named to eventually take over the state.

The successor to Menelik II was Lij Iyassu (1911–1916), Menelik's grandson. Unfortunately, however, young Lij Iyassu's reign would become increasingly tumultuous, as the whole process was characterized by tension with the same nobles who had, effectively, diminished the political role of Menelik's strong and charismatic wife, Empress Taytu. When the nobility opted to support Lij Iyassu's ambition of assuming political power, as his grandfather had promised, the possibility that they could manipulate his young age and lack of experience to their advantage was evident. The ruling elite soon realized, however, that they would not be able to accomplish what they had planned given the successor's inflexibility in submitting

to their demands and ultimatums so as to receive their support. Hence, the elite started to complain about the half-Muslim background of Lij Iyassu. Moreover, there were also conflicts between the nobles at the prospect of becoming the regent of the new king, who at that point was a teenager. Thus, given that becoming regent to Lij Iyassu held the promise of exerting great influence in the new regime, further quarrels among the elite ensued. Such internal political problems later contributed to the fall of the young king, through a coup orchestrated by Fitawrari Habte-Giorgis, one of Menelik II's confidants (Zewde 1991; Marcus 1994, 1995; Tibebe, 1995). Hence, the eventual successor of Menelik II's regime, thanks to his short and tumultuous reign, failed to leave any substantial political legacy in terms of shaping the future of the Ethiopian state. But a contribution worth mentioning is that of Lij Iyassu's considerate policies towards Muslim Ethiopians.

Zewde Gabre-Sellassie summarizes how the emperors suppressed the Muslims of Ethiopia as far back as the era of Tewodros II, and credits Iyassu as a reformer.

Tewodros, a man of wide vision in many respects, was bigoted when it came to Muslims, particularly the Muslims of Wollo. Yohannes, liberal and almost federal in his politics (of appeasing regional kings and men of influence), was even more uncompromising on the question of Orthodoxy and Christianity. Menelik, builder of the largest empire Ethiopia has ever seen, did little to integrate the heterogeneous entity into one nation. Iyassu's religious policy was the first major attempt to tackle the question of national integration, a question which has not been satisfactorily solved to this day.

(Gabre-Sellassie 1971: 124)

In general, the historical analysis above attests to the fact that Ethiopian politics at the start of the modern period was dominated by the legacies of emperors who led the country on the basis of a culture of elite interaction that was, in fact, a patrimonial rule based on loyalties and kinship. And such a system of interaction and rule resulted in their legacies becoming a hindrance to the consolidation of the democratization process, while also serving as a school at which future leaders and political elites could learn the smarts and strategies of political survival. The patrimonial system of old was in fact more about how the ruling class was set up and how it deterred the creation of a more representative political structure that could accommodate diverse groups' interests in a new, bigger, and stronger Ethiopian state. As mentioned earlier, however, by presenting Zewde's (1991) summary of religious inequality across the periods of four emperors in the modern period, we can see that there also existed other problems: grievances over inequalities and the formation of rebellions. Of course, although inequality in its different forms might not affect democratization or attempts at good governance, it affects the consolidation of it.¹⁵

Haile Selassie I: a strong state and survivalist institutional solutions (1930–1974)

Thus far, one can see that Menelik II effectively led Ethiopian resistance against colonialism, beckoned the country into transformations in transportation and communication, and helped bring instances of modernization. In any event, the lack of a democratic breakthrough is not at all surprising, as that cannot be expected in a political era when most of the countries in the world were not democratic. It can also be argued, however, that any democratic attempt that focused on issues of representation at the centre might have solved the issue of the emergence of far greater scales of political grievance, as occurred later. Once Menelik's political reign was over, and with his successor's role diminished to the point of historical and political irrelevance, and the problems that emerged because of the lack of consensus among the ruling elite, Teferi Mekonnen, who later assumed the throne as Emperor Haile Selassie I, comes onto the political scene as the most important historical figure in the history of Ethiopia, resulting in the emergence of a king who defines most of the country's political history in the twentieth century.

Emperor Haile Selassie, who first received valuable political experience as a regent to Menelik's daughter, Empress Zewditu (who for a short period of time had become the leader of the country after the *coup d'état* that ousted Lij Iyassu), continued the modernization efforts that Menelik II had started. Moreover, with the strong state apparatus that Menelik had left behind, and backed by a strong military and Menelik's ruling elite, which supported Haile Selassie to assume the imperial throne and keep Menelik's legacy intact, it is crucial to underline that Haile Selassie I emerged as the strongest political leader in this most vital period of Ethiopia's modern era.

The problem with how the political reign of Haile Selassie started, however, is that, although some of his first actions seemed promising at the beginning, the regime did not have the political will to come up with a modern institutional design of governance that could recognize the interests of diverse groups in the country. Thus, the failure to establish a political structure able to accommodate these diverse interests, which were being amplified by newly emerging ethnic elites, would lead to the emergence of rebel groups with ethnocentric organizing principles. The emperor was the first Ethiopian political leader to visit several European cities. He had studied the values of Western civilization, and was keen to bring aspects of it to his country – and he did so. Without the need to actually copy some ideals of governance, however, he could have implemented certain governance structures in ways that befitted the Ethiopian situation and the storied continuation of the state.

Regardless of the perceived and clear gaps in how he started his rule, however, Haile Selassie would play an instrumental role in persuading his close circle to write the first ever constitution of Ethiopia. Of course, the writing of the constitution initially received praise and raised great expectations among the citizenry and the slowly growing educated elite. It ended up as

a constitutional reinforcement of the king's rule, however, which was short of the foresights that signal the emergence of a constitutional monarchy. As Teferra Haile-Selassie's (1997) account of the 1931 Ethiopian constitution states, the emperor attempted to create a legislative assembly with upper and lower houses, with their members elected by the emperor and those who owned immovable property, respectively. Here, keep in mind that those who owned immovable property were the very elite whom the newly drafted and enacted constitution allowed him to select as members of the two houses. Nevertheless, to borrow the words of Haile-Selassie: "His subjects had neither the right to elect nor to be elected. At any rate, the constitution could be regarded as an important departure towards a constitutional rule in a society where the rights and duties of the people were determined by the whims of an emperor" (Haile-Selassie 1997: 37). Thus, unfortunately, the document failed both to mention the rights of diverse groups, by introducing something along the lines of Robert Dahl's (1973) procedural democratic ideals, and to spell out the limitations of his political power, as well as those of the legislative bodies that were established.

Furthermore, as Teshale Tibebu (1995) states, Haile Selassie also continued Menelik's staunch policy of appointments and dismissals (*shum-shir*, in Amharic) of individuals. Such appointments and dismissals by the regime are a testament to his intent to keep those loyal close and suspected traitors in check. As one of my anonymous interviewees, who happened to serve in the emperor's Cabinet, said,

The emperor, to his defence, was the most forgiving leader in Ethiopia's modern history. Although his dismissal of the political elite was with a design to keep them in check, he did not attempt to harm them. Rather, the emperor made sure that the dismissed Cabinet member or a former influential advisor would be ordered to serve the state by becoming an appointee in a remote peripheral region, which also ensured that the individual's threat at the centre would be diminished given he will be far away from the political capital of the state, Addis Ababa.¹⁶

Tibebu further argues that the emperor created a strong bureaucracy that helped him eventually remove the *geber* system (tax collected from the peasant in cash or in kind, as well as labour), which Menelik II had expanded when he applied it to the newly reincorporated territories. The creation of the bureaucracy, according to Tibebu, was critical, since it afforded the emperor greater freedom to control political power by removing the old elites who were not his "patrimonial clients", or those who he no longer considered loyal to his throne (Tibebu 1995: 122). Thanks to the emperor's enthusiasm for and commitment to education, the emergence of bureaucracy also accommodated the newly growing number of Western-educated intellectuals. That would lead to the eventual replacement of the patrimonial political culture by a newly emerged neo-patrimonial political elite, which still had the characteristics of

the old era in terms of the ever-present emphasis on political loyalties, but also intertwined with the advent of a functioning bureaucracy that created a stronger state.

It was while Emperor Haile Selassie I was shaping Ethiopian politics as he pleased and saw appropriate, however, that a second Italian colonial attempt emerged, which would become his greatest challenge, vastly more serious than anything he had ever faced in the early stages of his reign. The rest of the country continued the struggle against colonialism, while Haile Selassie went into exile after his unsuccessful plea to the League of Nations to avert the Italian invasion and conduct important activities as a king diplomat. Unfortunately, his efforts failed to tame the aggression of the Fascist regime, filled with determination born out of a desire for vengeance after the defeat suffered at the hands of Menelik II's army (Zewde 1991; Tibebe 1995; Marcus 1994; Haile-Selassie 1997). After a five-year hiatus in his reign, and once the Italians had been defeated with the Allied powers (mainly the British) helping Ethiopian patriotic forces, the emperor ultimately returned from exile to rule the country. Upon his return, Haile Selassie I's skill in political manoeuvrings also remained intact, as he continued to rule single-handedly with the new neo-patrimonial client, the bureaucracy, now orchestrating the show. In a seminal work, Robert Jackson and Carl Rosberg (1982) analyse Haile Selassie's period after the Second World War and how he still affirmed the patrimonial nature of his political reign in the new setting, pointing to the fact that old norms just never fade away. The authors assess the second major modification to the 1931 constitution, which was rewritten in 1955, and argue that, under that newly enacted constitutional reform, some of the characters of "Ethiopian patrimonialism was given formal constitutional recognition" (Jackson & Rosberg 1982: 121). They summarize the reformed and ratified constitution of 1955 thus:

In 1955 the newly adopted Constitution for Ethiopia "legalized" the traditional principle of divine emperorship, vesting sovereignty in person of the Emperor, who alone exercised "supreme authority" over "all affairs of the empire" (Art. 26). The patronage (appointive) powers of the emperor over the government and the administration were extensive, enabling him to treat state affairs as exclusively his own. He was empowered to determine the "organization, powers and duties" of all the ministries, departments, and branches of the government, as well as appoint, promote, transfer, suspend and dismiss "the officials of the same" (Art. 27).

(Jackson & Rosberg 1982: 121)

In general, as the 1931 and 1955 constitutions both show, for much of his reign Emperor Haile Selassie I did not have the much-needed political will to create laws as well as institutions that could prepare the groundwork for the emergence of representative institutions and address the lingering inequalities across many groups. Instead, both the constitutional reforms

and the occasional decrees published in *Negarit Gazetta* (a newsletter that publishes approved legislative bills in the country) served his interests of ensuring his political survival and strengthening imperial rule, at the expense of addressing the growing interests of the educated elite, who began to demand the bestowing of political representation and new programmes providing economic equality to all ethnic groups. Hence, just as Menelik II, who, among his accomplishments, defeated colonialism at the end of the nineteenth century and created the modern state boundaries, failed to contribute to initiating the process of democratic pacification across the country, Haile Selassie I, the key Ethiopian political leader of the twentieth century, also failed to contribute some basic foundations to the democratic aspirations of the Ethiopian people. Nevertheless, the emperor established a strong bureaucracy and successfully created urban centres, the country's economy greatly improved (albeit remaining susceptible to shocks), and the education system was expanded with the setting up of higher academic institutions all across the country; and these great works increased the numbers of the educated elite. All in all, the positives of the Haile Selassie regime overshadow the negatives. Unfortunately, student movement and ethnic rebellions, which demanded greater freedom and equality, became a challenge to his regime's survival.

Emperor Haile Selassie's administration, obviously with the blessing of the king himself, agreed to come up with a series of reforms, and it did indeed enact some. Imperial rule would eventually come to an abrupt end, however, after a group of lower-ranked military officers formed a committee (by calling themselves the Dergue) and orchestrated a successful military coup in September 1974. After the military coup had ousted the emperor from the helm of political power, which he had held for so long, Ethiopia went deep into a protracted period of civil war and civil strife (from 1974 to 1991). The prospects for democracy became unthinkable. The new regime, led by Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam, which created alliances with eastern European political powers, mainly the Soviet Union, and other members of the communist bloc, such as Cuba and Yugoslavia, would also emerge as a political force for the worst. This friendship with the eastern bloc, it is important to note, did not help the military regime to survive, which essentially voids the issue of foreign intervention playing any role. At the end of the Cold War, and after the conclusion of a brutal 17 years of civil war, a hastily formed political coalition called the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) assumed political power after the socialist military regime collapsed in May 1991, days after Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam had left for exile in Harare, Zimbabwe.

Sadly, the opportunities the military regime had to implement nationwide development efforts, despite staying in power for 17 years, and introduce political reforms in most of the country were limited, given that the bulk of its time in power was spent on war efforts. The exception was the initial period, when the Dergue issued its famous proclamation with regard to the distribution of rural land to the peasantry, thereby attempting to address both

the economic inequalities in heavily agricultural parts of the country and the “Land to the tiller” demand from the student protests from the previous era.

Nevertheless, although the military regime spent most of its time in power engaged in warfare with the rebellions that it considered a threat to Ethiopian unity, it is important to take a step back to assess the Dergue era in terms of how the bureaucracy evolved and the cycle of the political culture of elite interaction continued; these topics will be looked at more broadly in the next chapter. Moreover, besides the historical analysis of the political era dominated by the military in the 1970s and 1980s, the chapter also assesses how the failings of the Dergue led to the TPLF-led EPRDF coalition coming onto the political scene and declaring its intent to address ethnocentric questions, and evaluates the popular grievances of various groups and how they also, in turn, used such solutions for their elites’ ultimate political survival.

Notes

- 1 The 1994 movie *Imperfect Journey*, produced and narrated by Haile Gerima, can be found here: www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZQYwYEMCANA.
- 2 For further information, please consult Vaughan & Tronvoll (2003: 25ff.).
- 3 Look at page 24. This seminal work by Donald Levine is one of the most influential scholarly achievements by anyone interested in studying Ethiopia. There are many debates about it. But the way Levine looks at the “both or more sides” of any topic makes it a balanced scholarly contribution.
- 4 The EPRDF, of course, was dissolved in November 2019 as part of the changes inspired and led by the then prime minister, Abiy Ahmed.
- 5 Merera Gudina’s paper is prepared mostly from his earlier article (Gudina 2003: 159).
- 6 The years or numbers of years mentioned by Tibebe should be different every new year. For instance, those who thought Ethiopian history is 100 years old at the time Tibebe’s work was published in 1995 might, in 2020, say the country is 125 years old.
- 7 Tibebe’s explanations about the historical periods come up as a result of the debate as to the age of the Ethiopian Empire, and such differences are inherently related to the historical and cultural identities of the political and intellectual elites that write about it.
- 8 For more, see Merera Gudina’s work analysing the Ethiopian state’s historical evolution and its quest for democracy (Gudina 2002: 270).
- 9 David Laitin’s argument in his study of the Yorubaland in Nigeria shows that the experiences of sub-Saharan African countries are that political culture could be constructed. For more, see Laitin (1985).
- 10 For more, see Victor Le Vine’s interpretation of Weber’s accounts of patrimonialism from the perspective of African states (Le Vine 1980: 658).
- 11 For more, see Jackson and Rosberg (1982: 121).
- 12 Bratton and van de Walle (1994) provide justifications for considering neo-patrimonialism as a regime type. Although I argue that this concept can be seen as a kind of political culture, as a derivative of patrimonialism, its peculiar characteristics do show that it can also be seen as a stand-alone regime type.

- 13 Although many encyclopedias and factbooks offer different numbers as to how many ethnic groups make up the Ethiopian state, Asnake Kefale does a good job in explaining the ethnic and linguistic make-up of the country in his book *Federalism and Ethnic Conflict in Ethiopia* (Kefale 2013).
- 14 To learn more about the history of the Battle of Adwa, there are many opportunities, but I first suggest reading the biographies of Emperor Menelik II by Tekle Tsadik Mekuria (Mekuria 1983) and Paulos Gnogno (Gnogno 2014). I also recommend this good compilation: Milkias and Metaferia (2005).
- 15 See Houle (2009). His article refutes theories arguing that inequality threatens both democracy and consolidation, and agrees only with inequality's negative effect on consolidation.
- 16 Interviewee 26 served in two different positions under Haile Selassie's rule. The interviewee, at the time of the interview, was living in the United States.

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3 The rise and fall of the military regime and the emergence of the TPLF-led EPRDF coalition

Introduction: the Dergue, political reforms going “south”

In the political regime of Emperor Haile Selassie I, the question of a return for trust and power was important. For groups and their political elites that felt alienated, forming armed rebellions and fighting either to win greater freedoms for the people they “represented” or to contemplate secessionist agendas would become the new politics. The student movement, which was transformational and a quite unprecedented development in the country’s history, would also become a cultivating ground for leaders who later joined the rebellions. In particular, students primarily from the northern and historically dominant part of the state, who were mostly behind the revolutionary idea of toppling the imperial regime so that a more equal Ethiopia might emerge, embraced seemingly utopian socialist ideologies used in the struggle against the central government. That was not surprising, given that most students were enthused with socialist conceptions having been inspired by Marxist teachings and the history of socialist revolutions, including the Soviet Union’s.¹

The rise of guerrilla rebellions, sizable and recurring student protests, and underground networks of resistance would all become unbearable for the imperial regime. The emperor, who would later introduce reforms to appease the rising tensions, at first increased the powers of his prime minister, such that he was able to preside over an extended Cabinet. Most important political powers remained in the hands of the king, however. Second, the pay rises that had been intended to appease the broader elite, the military bureaucracy, and parts of the state bureaucracy also failed to hit the strategic target of maintaining the dwindling loyalty of those close to him. In general, everything the emperor implemented to try and satisfy the demands of the increasingly frustrated elite and educated youth eventually failed.² The famine that then emerged in most of the southern, north-eastern, and central highlands, and the ineffective and disappointing response of the emperor’s administration to the impending humanitarian crisis, further began to delegitimize his rule. Coupled with the stroke that paralysed his son, Crown Prince Asfaw Wosen, taking a huge toll on the morale of the ageing emperor, most

of the political powers he had possessed for so long slowly but dramatically started to slip away, leaving the country's political fortunes in the hands of an 82-year-old ruler who was not even receiving complete updates of what was going on in the country he had reigned over for more than 40 years.

The students' protests, which carried the famous motto "Land to the tiller", which was well received by the peasantry and the urban educated elite, also resonated with the lower-ranking military elite, as well as with small numbers of highly ranked generals (Tareke 1991), because, in somewhat "feudalistic" patrimonial Ethiopia, property rights were non-existent, and those who had those rights were the nobility, who were loyal patrons of the imperial regime. When the military deposed the emperor, on 12 September 1974, the revolutionary movement had come full circle.

The problem turned out to be, however, as Harold Marcus (1994) explains, "the replacement of the old elite with a new one".³ The initial impression of the Dergue seemed to be one of compromise, as General Aman Andom, who was of Eritrean origin, and General Teferi Benti seemed in control. Unfortunately, the promise held out by their leadership was short-lived, as both of them were executed by the military, and the hope immediately disappeared. With the deaths of such individuals, who some considered "reformist", the military regime's solutions in terms of appeasing the rebellion in the north, mainly in Eritrea and the Tigray highlands, and the economic programmes they envisaged were also laid to rest. Here, the questions of political representation and economic equality, the very reasons that had ignited the rebellions in most of the north and among the Oromos, led by the Oromo Liberation Front in the south, induced further student uprisings. Small- and large-scale mutinies in the military re-emerged, keeping the issues of political and economic inequalities, in addition to demands for democratization, as the most foundational problems driving the quest for a new Ethiopia; they would continue as core debates for the next couple of decades that followed.

Let us see what the Dergue actually accomplished, if anything. With the eventual declaration in 1976 of scientific socialism as a guiding ideological principle for its military rule, the Dergue quickly formed peasant associations (*gebere mahibers*, in Amharic) and new youth and women's associations along the lines of socialistic modes of operation, the country not only became isolated from the Western world, which imperial rule had relied upon for political and economic support and legitimacy. In addition, the land reforms, which started with the nationalization decrees, and eventually distributed rural land to the peasant households, lacked uniformity across the nation, resulting in the emergence of further grievances on the part of those who felt disgruntled. The patronage system of old, focused on the prior regime's reliance on the nobility, would be soon replaced by a different form of patronage, which relied on the socialist political ideology of the Dergue's newly established Ethiopian Workers' Party. Membership of the newly formed *mahibers* (associations) of youth, women, and peasants would become a requirement for receiving acknowledgement of any form from the government. The various groups'

quests for the recognition of ethnic grievances were also left unanswered, as the regime's emphasis was directed towards consolidating national unity. The once fast-growing infrastructure and modernization schemes of the imperial era were put in jeopardy by the military regime's subsequent decision to use the nation's wealth on the war front, to counter these very ethnic rebellions, which it considered an "unfortunate" challenge to the country's unity and pan-nationalist programmes, taking the country further into uncharted territories of uncertainty and a protracted civil war, which would last for at least 17 years. The Dergue, of course, could not be blamed for the war, as it was left with no choice but to defend Ethiopia's unity and sovereignty.

Sadly, the real reforms introduced under the military regime, focused mainly on the issue of property rights, would soon be forgotten, despite satisfying some elements of the peasantry. This is without discussing the various bouts of infighting within the Dergue, mainly the break-up of ideological camps within the military, the most damaging divisions occurring within the military's intellectual ideologues, as well as some independent onlookers who attempted to broker dealings (though these were devoid of any influence anyway). Nevertheless, the politicization of ethnic tensions by the propaganda of the rebels in every corner of the country took the so-called "competing national and ethnic interests" from the student movement era in the time of Haile Selassie I's regime to a whole new level.⁴ Such developments would also lay the foundations for the debate over individual versus group rights, which, to some extent, had already emerged in the imperial era. For the political elite, busy fighting each other within the Dergue, and for those who had raised arms to fight the regime as a whole, addressing the issue of rights would be considered the only avenue to address the political and economic inequalities across the many groups in Ethiopia.

The 1974 revolution in review

Failing to discuss the historic nature of one of the most crucial events in the country's history – the 1974 downfall of the imperial regime – and its significance would definitely be a disservice. Doing so also puts into context the discussions of the chapter up to this point. The 1974 change in government and the transition that followed constituted a full-fledged revolution, an epoch-making event with historical similarities to many of the world's popular social revolutions, such as those in France in 1789 and in Cuba in 1959. Through this revolution in 1974, Ethiopia was transformed from a pseudo-feudalistic imperial state to a socialist one within just a few years. As discussed earlier, the revolution had also involved students, workers, the peasantry, and the educated elite, and, of course, it was also acknowledged by the broader sets of political elites in the old and new regimes. The revolution, as already stated, was undoubtedly caused by widespread popular grievances. Despite containing, arguably, all the elements of a true revolution, however, it failed to deliver on its promises to address the issues raised by a widespread

popular movement with rising expectations. As one former rebel leader clearly said, "The problems with the country's political transitions is that the seeds that enticed revolutionary movements, which also received wider support for a hope of new beginning, would soon disappear, and the new political regime emerged as a worse copy of the regime it replaced."⁵

Just as the above former-rebel-turned-civil-servant stated, the revolution that failed to provide answers to such expectations was indeed consequential, as it led to a replacement regime that never seemed interested in relieving the burdens of those who felt deprived of their political as well as economic equality. Instead, the military regime invoked a nationalist agenda based, in the view of many, on simple nostalgia: the creation of a strong national state, with no attempt to reach a compromise on the competing ethnic interests, which had long seemed to be irreconcilable differences. Unfortunately, the fact that the regime would also lose its potential to make amends for its mistakes in its rule continued until its removal from power in 1991, at the hands of a coalition of rebellions that had successfully waged civil war against it for almost two decades. Although I mostly agree with the widely held popular notion that "the rebels would not actually have won against the Dergue if it had not been for the government military forces' 'weak morale'", the fact that the regime was overthrown in and of itself should be regarded as a defeat.

Gebru Tareke, in his seminal work entitled *The Ethiopian Revolution: War in the Horn of Africa*, sums up the failure thus: "The revolutionary government ultimately lost because it failed to deliver on its big promises: freedom, equality, and prosperity" (Tareke 2009: 2). Tareke also points out, however, that the political elite at the centre of political power were not much affected. According to him, what happened instead explains how the top-down political manoeuvrings of the past would continue in the military socialist regime era. Hence, the affected – the people on the political "periphery" – kept their grievances alive and emerged as a force that fed stronger and emerging rebellions, which eventually toppled a military regime that had ruled the country with an iron fist while relying on the socialist Eastern bloc for military and economic support – a bloc that was nowhere to be found when it was needed the most, as it had crumbled beyond repair in the last few years of the 1980s and the early 1990s.

Thus it was that international political dynamics in the era after the Cold War had its own huge say in deciding the fortune of the Ethiopian state. Nevertheless, both the departure of Eritrea, with the success of the Eritrean People's Liberation Front, and the coming together of the Oromo nationalists, the Tigrayan nationalists, and some Amhara elites that had fought the military regime under an Ethiopian pan-national agenda led by the Ethiopian People's Democratic Movement (later becoming the Amhara National Democratic Movement), as well as the emergence of other satellite PDOs (People's Democratic Organizations, representing various ethnic agendas), show that, despite the international factors playing out among the determining factors that ended the military's rule, the downfall of the Dergue's

regime was ultimately based on the fact that it failed to bring about political and economic equality to the peoples within the Ethiopian state. Instead, the military regime had remained wedded to its assumption of the potential of its military might to defeat the rebels and its pseudo-socialist political and economic ideologies to continue the revolutionary development of the state. As a result, anyone writing on the political history of Ethiopia or seeking to come up with a causal argument for understanding the Ethiopian state's democratic failings and/or mechanisms of authoritarian survival needs to work to present fresh perspectives on these competing ethnic tensions from the past and how they continue to circulate and affect the present state of politics in the country.

Competing ethnic nationalisms at the forefront of the political struggle

Now that the Dergue is gone and a new reality of ethnocentric political discourse has emerged since 1991, competing ethnic interests in the country, as explained earlier, have continued as the epicentre of the last three decades of Ethiopian politics. In an effort to analyse the post-1991 democratic setbacks in Ethiopia, the role of the opposition, and the issue of competing ethnic interests, Sandra Joireman sums it up by stating that

previous Ethiopian regimes, eager to foster pan-Ethiopianist feeling and break down the opposition posed by organized ethnic groups, have tried to downplay the issue of ethnicity. But their attempts to minimize the “nationalities question” have been remarkably ineffective. Indeed, many of the currently legitimized political parties started as ethnically based movements during the Imperial or *Dergue* eras.

(Joireman 1997: 389)

The argument above indeed shows the continuity of the ethnic agenda, based on the popular grievances born out of political and economic inequalities. Certainly, the fact that the main political actors that emerged in the last decade of the imperial rule, the ones that flourished in the Dergue era, and the newly emerging political opposition in contemporary Ethiopia are devoid of a common national agenda might well have inspired Joireman's article. In fact, the article's title, “Opposition politics and ethnicity in Ethiopia: we will all go down together”, is very telling of the complexities of what has become of the Ethiopian state in the last few decades (Joireman 1997: 387).

The TPLF-led EPRDF: a new reality

The EPRDF coalition led by its pioneers, the Tigray People's Liberation Front, promised democratization and eventually adopted a new constitution that made such intentions potentially clear from the outset. The practicality

of what is written in the Ethiopian constitution (ratified in 1994) would immediately become questionable, however. Enquiring “where Ethiopia is going” yet gain becomes a central question. Nevertheless, as one can see from the political history of Menelik II and Haile Selassie I and how the patrimonial political culture impeded any prospects of democratization in their political eras (though expectations were unwarranted), and how the Dergue’s reluctance to answer the question of freedom and equality by prioritizing the creation and implementation of a nationalist agenda, it is clear that the legacy of these previous regimes also influenced the EPRDF-led political regime to function under a political structure that has become an obstacle to democratic consolidation efforts. Ethiopian elites that vie to rule a state of diverse groups, a nation of more than 80 languages, and a complex history that largely escaped the era of colonialism by fighting together as one nation, and their continuance devoid of common national agendas and issues of consensus, therefore remains puzzling to this day.

Why the political elite at the centre of political power in various regimes and the elites behind the political rebellions would fail to agree on the commonalities of the need for the political and economic equality and compromises across many issues of political concern in the type of Ethiopian state they envisaged is not mysterious, however. Central political power in the modern Ethiopian state has always been dictated by northerners such as the Amhara and Tigray political elites, whose cultural similarities, their dominant Orthodox Christianity, and their history have been at the centre of their political strength (Levine 1991). The difference, however, was that, whereas political elites in Tigray, in particular Emperor Yohannes IV, had nationalist agendas, the elites that followed within the Tigray political bloc shifted from their nationalist agenda towards an agenda more focused on the need to limit the stronger Amhara dominance that followed the death of Emperor Yohannes IV.⁶ For their part, the Amhara elite, with the exception of the growing educated elite in the era of Haile Selassie I, remained focused on the need to bridge ethnic differences by creating a centralized government structure that could become the basis for a pan-Ethiopian identity and, thus, unity, which they also considered the ultimate solution as it would be the best way to diminish ethnic tensions and the probability of future conflicts.

The Oromos of Ethiopia – arguably a majority ethnic group in the country, given the data from the last census, conducted in 2007, with a very strong, ethnically limited, semi-democratic political culture, the *Gada* system, which coped with the diverse Oromo political interests relatively harmoniously – have felt removed from the political discourse during much of modern Ethiopia’s history. Of course, such assertions continue to be highly debated, since many political elites, from Menelik II to Haile Selassie I, were mostly selected or appointed from ethnic Oromo societies. Regardless, such a feeling of historical marginalization was not taken lightly by the newly growing educated Oromo elites. As a result, Oromo elites started to demand not just greater freedoms but a change to what they claimed was “continued exclusion” from

political power at the centre. What became extremely divisive, however, was the fact that the elites made their new intentions clear by declaring the need for establishing a country for the Oromos, a state of Oromia, independent of the Ethiopian state, which they considered oppressive and unrepairable.⁷

Hence, the political programmes or ambitions among the three most important and historically powerful ethnic groups' political elites (Tigrayan, Amhara, and Oromo) were difficult to mend. Thus, sadly, Ethiopia's fate had to rely on miraculous political circumstances that might lead the way for one of those influential groups' political elites to change course in their ideological dogmas and political programmes, as compromises were difficult to reach given that most of these groups lacked a national agenda, with some Amhara elites forming the exception.

Temporarily, however, this conundrum would be solved when the Tigrayan elite eventually dropped their separatist agenda (although the TPLF remained a liberation front, in name, until its military defeat in 2020) by providing a new agenda of compromise, for an Ethiopian state with an ethnic federal arrangement and ambitions of granting equal political and economic freedoms on the basis of a greater emphasis on group rights. An Ethiopian Oromo political opposition leader and a renowned political scientist, Merera Gudina (2003) in fact sums up such developments by saying that the Ethiopian state was initially a "political thesis" of the Amhara, which faced the growing "anti-Ethiopian theses" of the Oromo, which later had to be saved by the federal "syntheses" introduced by the Tigray political elites.⁸ Here, the question becomes whether such new promises to answer the competing ethnic questions of political and economic inequality and the quest for democratic development could be realized.

Nevertheless, this question also remains: why did the nation's politics get in such a precarious state in the first place? The neo-patrimonial political culture of elite interaction, manifested through its rewarding of loyalty and kinship as a basis for political trust and opportunity, goes some way to answering the question. It is also crucial, however, to discuss the various political scenarios that might have saved the nation from the continuing ethnic tensions that kept alive the competition between the ethnically organized political elites. To understand this, let us look at the new era of rule by the TPLF-dominated EPRDF coalition and how the political culture of elite interaction, as discussed, transformed itself in the post-1991 period.

Neo-patrimonial/clientelist reality and challenges to democratic consolidation in a survivalist EPRDF coalition

Democratization in Ethiopia was "declared" introduced after the military dictatorship led by Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam was overthrown in 1991. The Dergue's replacement, a coalition called Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front under the leadership of a savvy young politician and former rebel leader, Meles Zenawi, was the party alliance that made

such intentions towards a commitment for democracy clear. Zenawi, who also chaired the Tigray People's Liberation Front, which successfully designed and implemented the construction of the EPRDF coalition, emerged as the new strongman (Abbink 2006). Certainly, the "intentions" in terms of democratization efforts remain true to this day (given the periodic elections, and popular participation with the involvement of opposition political parties some of the time) – something that was not the case with previous regimes. The EPRDF regime's projection of its intentions were eventually proved to be false, however, and, when the coalition was finally replaced by the Prosperity Party in late 2019, its characteristics in the guise of democratization became apparent.

As we earlier saw from Erdman and Engel's definition of the concept, neo-patrimonialism is a clientelist relationship that overshadows the "constitutional rulebooks" of the state. With a neo-patrimonial regime in power, all signs of democratization in the country are just for show. Moreover, group representation in government was also constrained by the clientelist nature of neo-patrimonial politics under the EPRDF, which rewarded political loyalty along ethnic and linguistic lines. The EPRDF-coalition-led regime also did not waste time in introducing a federal structure constituted along ethnic and linguistic lines. Such an institutional design, which Gudina (2002) explains as the Tigray elites' conciliatory mechanism to appease the highly divisive approach of the Oromo and Amhara elites, was primarily a brokered solution to keep the Ethiopian state intact, with the exception of Eritrea's departure, as the EPLF (now the PFDJ) went on to establish a new state after a successful but controversial process of secession.

Nonetheless, despite the ethnically clientelist EPRDF-led regime's attempts to create highly representative government, among others, it failed to clearly put the separation of power between regional governments and the central government (led by the TPLF-controlled EPRDF coalition) in practical terms, despite the fact that the constitution had already generated a more or less a democratic law of the land, with article 49 stipulating the powers of the newly minted regional states in the federal design.⁹ In addition, the institutions that the EPRDF designed to facilitate the political representation of various ethnic groups became too narrow (Fiseha 2012).

When we look closely at the case studies conducted in a few regional states by Asnake Kefale (2013), even the ethnic federal arrangements in place seemed to have provided a political framework for the representation of minorities in the central government and bestowed some level of regional autonomy. In practice, however, it was the clientelist regime tightly controlled by the TPLF, which dominated the EPRDF coalition, that became the one that exclusively oversees centre–region relations in Ethiopia. Kefale argues that the fact that the federal constitution does not explain the institutional context of the federal–regional relations in Ethiopia in clear terms has allowed the EPRDF-led regime to effectively dominate the two layers of the federal structure in Ethiopia (Kefale 2013: 237). Kefale further argues that the EPRDF's

decision to establish the Office of Regional Affairs (ORA) in 1995 was to help the coalition's agenda of effective control of the regional governments by installing advisors who were expected to guide the day-to-day decision making of the regional governments. The role of such advisors is to verify whether such decisions are made according to the interests of the TPLF-led EPRDF coalition. Such political schemes by the TPLF especially hampered the different minority-led regional governments in the Afar, Benishangul-Gumuz, Gambella, and Ethiopian Somali regions, and their rights to regional autonomy and to self-administration as promised in the very Ethiopian federal constitution that was sponsored, drafted, and confirmed by EPRDF members of parliament. In his study of how the TPLF controlled the regional administrations from 1992 to 2001, Kefale further mentions a regional official from the Somali region who told him:

In the first place, when the team of advisors who were supposed to provide assistance come to our region, their group leader would be stationed at the office of the regional president. Soon after his arrival, he would assume the utmost power in the regional government. No important decision can be made without his approval. Even those advisors who came to provide technical advice in different policy sectors do not work with their professional colleagues. They would rather give instructions to the bureaus.

(Kefale 2013: 238)

Such failed attempts to create a political framework (through ethnic federalism) to even try to accommodate the diverse ethnic groups in political representation shows that the federal set-up was not genuinely planned from the start (Aalen 2006). A former politician who worked for the Amhara regional state (which is the second largest region in the country) also mentioned, in an extended interview, that the regional advisory office set up by the EPRDF coalition had always been led by political appointees who mostly come from the Tigray regional state, which is the administrative home of the TPLF.¹⁰

Given the greater control of political power by Tigrayan elites, such opinions shared by the respondent were not shocking in any way. According to the interviewee's account, "All the decision made by regional state presidents and authorities, either simply a routine one or big ones, must be first communicated to the regional advisor who was appointed by the federal government (which was considered TPLF political leaders' playground throughout most of the political period under the EPRDF's rule." Another interviewee also corroborated interviewee 4's assertions by saying that "most regional state authorities were dismayed by the presence of the shadow of someone like the regional advisor, whom they eventually considered a position that was created just to spy on the activities of regional states' political elites and to make sure that the individual appointee checks their loyalties to the TPLF-led EPRDF coalition's political programmes and goals".¹¹

Moreover, such gaps between the intended purpose of the federal structure and what transpired in practice in the country are responsible for causing the problems affecting the democratization attempt in Ethiopia (Fiseha 2006). Here, the question is how such a dysfunctional federal structure could show us the clientelist nature of the neo-patrimonial regime, which is an obstacle to democratic consolidation in Ethiopia, while making sure that the survivalist interest of the new regimes remained intact. In this regard, Paulos Chanie, after extensive field research across regions in Ethiopia, argues, “new patronage systems or unofficial mechanisms for maintaining traditional clientelism exist. Regional political leaders cannot raise issues concerning the new patronage mechanisms as this would endanger their political position” (Chanie 2007: 381). Chanie further argues that, in Ethiopia, the decentralization that many minority groups had believed would solve the problems associated with their lack of political representation in government and self-administration rights in previous regimes turned out to be unsuccessful as a result of the clientelist dealings between federal and regional political authorities.

Such clientelist political relations, exhibited via the patron–client relationship that emerged between the regional states and the central government, as well as the bureaucracy’s diminished role because of the dominance of the newly emerging EPRDF party structure, will be discussed in detail in Part 2 of the book. It is vital to note, however, that the plans that the EPRDF had in mind when it arrived at the helm of political power with regard to the promotion of the group rights agenda proved a failure. In explaining such patronage networks and the nature of clientelist relations between the central government and regions in the country, Chanie further states:

Nonetheless, traditional clientelism between the TPLF and its constituency is maintained through different and unofficial patronage networks, off-budget funds and non-transparent central government infrastructure allocations to regions. Revealing patronage systems through reliable and complete data is not possible, since such systems are secretive and may incite ethnic conflict.

(Chanie 2007: 379)

Chanie’s attempt to study the failure of Ethiopia’s federalism and its decentralization efforts in fact shows the failure of the ethno-linguistic arrangement to create a democratic framework for political representation as well as a balanced federal structure that entertained both interests at the centre and the regional states.

As Wolf Linder and André Bächtiger (2005) also argue, decentralization is very helpful in assisting new democracies in their democratic consolidation efforts, but, unless the structure in place is conducive, there are no guarantees that it will work. It could also be argued that, as the findings from Chanie’s field research further show, because of the high levels of clientelist relations

between regional and central political leaders (given that the political parties in the biggest regional states are also members of the EPRDF political coalition at the centre, creating branch political parties at the regional states), the prospects for democratic consolidation in Ethiopia were slim at best from the start. Moreover, Chanie's findings also indicate that the existence of financially strong "TPLF-owned large conglomerates, patronage networks through off-budget funding, and the presence of non-transparent distribution of centrally funded service provisions such as transport, communication and energy infrastructures" all indicate what strengthened and maintained the clientelist relations that effectively hampered the democratization efforts and paved the way for the success of authoritarian survival tactics (Chanie 2007: 379–381).

Moreover, as explained by an individual who had served under the EPRDF-controlled regime and to whom I mentioned Chanie's findings, and asked if he could corroborate some of the arguments stated there, explained that "in my work for the government, both at a federal and regional levels, not only what Chanie mentioned are what reinforce the clientelist tendencies and characters in the relations between the regional state elites and those at the centre, but even more so the political appointments that those at the regional states possessed were also guaranteed by their willingness to work with those at the centre by keeping the TPLF-led EPRDF party discipline intact".¹²

Clientelist relations between the regional states and the federal government also extend to the bureaucracy, which is highly impacted by the patronage structure that such a neo-patrimonial state fully demonstrates. In this regard, in explaining how ethnic federalism in Ethiopia transferred this clientelist character of the state into the bureaucracy, Samuel Bonda states,

Despite, the ethnic federalism has granted regional states to administer themselves and promote their language and culture, the ethnicization and politicization of staffing the bureaucracy is still problematic. In other words, the recruitment and appointment of bureaucratic staff is mainly based on ethno-language criteria rather than competitive meritocracy. As a result, state capacity and effectiveness is still a key bottleneck to implement the policy. Moreover, the ethnicization and politicization of state bureaucrats in the country is a critical challenge.

(Bonda 2011: 5)

As we can see from Bonda's explanation, the clientelist nature of the neo-patrimonial regime's incursion into the bureaucratic apparatus of the state had derailed the confidence of the civil servants and politicized the services rendered to the people, and the hiring and promotions policy within the bureaucracy indicated that, in fact, the EPRDF regime did not differentiate the public sphere from its own party sphere. Here, it is important also to mention

that the bureaucracy had already emerged as an even stronger component of Ethiopia's executive arm in the post-1991 political transition. The problem, which Part 2 of the book will explain in broader terms, is that the way the bureaucracy was designed and implemented never allowed it to operate independently from the political system. The regime's design of the bureaucracy in general and its tight control of it in regional states in particular show that the political elite at the centre (the TPLF's political machines in the federal government, especially at the EPRDF headquarter in Addis Ababa) had already been aware of the importance of fully capturing the bureaucracy as a way to create the patronage system that works to the interests of the survivalist ambitions of the TPLF-led political coalition at the helm of the administrative power of the Ethiopians state.

Thus far, the attempt here has been to describe how the clientelist nature of the EPRDF-led neo-patrimonial regime in Ethiopia hindered democratic consolidation efforts through its undemocratic designs of institutions, which now serve as roadblocks in how the state functions under ethnic federalism, and how the coalition manipulated relations even by overriding the constitution of the state. Now, we see how clientelism also constrains the democratization process in Ethiopia with regard to the electoral system and how elections are conducted, which also compelled the political representation of minorities in the government as well as their rights for self-administration in regional states, leading the way to nothing but the survival of the political elite, which designed such forms of institutional relations for that purpose.

As Regina Goodnow and Robert Moser's (2012) explanation shows, the type of electoral system a state follows is critical in affecting the level of minority representation – more so than the type of federal government in place. In their assessment of whether ethnic federalism increases minority candidates' vote share or encourages minority turnout, the authors find that majority-minority districts¹³ are more important than what ethnic federalism could provide for the same purpose of expanding representation rights. Therefore, in this respect, the EPRDF regime's ethnic federal agenda fails to translate into ethnic minorities gaining representation proportionate to their population size. In this regard, it is possible to agree with the assertion that the most direct way to make parliaments more accessible to ethnic minorities is to establish proportional electoral systems that will maximize various groups' chances of securing parliamentary seats (Alonso & Ruiz-Rufino 2007; Fiseha 2012). The current electoral system in Ethiopia, as Beza Dessalegn (2013) also discusses, effectively shuts down the political representation opportunities for many minority groups in Ethiopia. Dessalegn argues:

The "first past the post" system embodied in Ethiopia's electoral law denies national and regional minorities equitable and adequate share of political power in the respective federal and regional councils. Hence, taking into

consideration Ethiopia's long history of competing ethnic nationalisms and lack of consensus, there is the need for securing adequate representation proportional to the numerical presence of minorities in constituencies in lieu of stubborn adherence solely to the majoritarian plurality system.

(Dessalegn 2013: 1)

In line with Dessalegn's argument, John Ishiyama (2009) also conducted a simulation of Ethiopia's election system by comparing it to different electoral systems, and argues that, in systems other than the current majoritarian rule, the country's opposition political groups would perform better and there was a possibility that the violence following the 2005 national election could have been prevented.

Moreover, as well as the EPRDF regime failing to integrate its newly adopted federal structure with the right kind of electoral system that could support each other's success, the lack of it might have also impeded minorities and opposition coalition parties from likely electoral success through various undemocratic tactics that made electoral competition non-existent. In showing how the EPRDF's successful obstruction of the electoral process transpired, starting from the early years of the regime, Alemante Gebre-Selassie (1992) states that "the EPRDF undermined the prospects for democracy by employing violent and undemocratic tactics to upset election proceedings in order to maintain power". The upshot of these policies is the illegitimate concentration of political power in the hands of the EPRDF, especially in the hands of TPLF leaders, who had initially orchestrated the formation of the coalition, thereby keeping control of most political power within the coalition.

There was also a complete absence of demarcation between the powers that the EPRDF coalition elites have, as the dominant party ruling the state, and the regional state authorities – a situation that Selassie confirms using a French saying, "The more things change, the more they are the same" (Gebre-Selassie 1992: 206). From Selassie's further arguments, we can also see that the fact that the regime considers the wealth of the state as its own in fact signifies the neo-patrimonial characters of the EPRDF. As a result, the replacement of the old rule by a new incumbent becomes the norm rather than the exception, much like what had transpired in the post-1974 era.

Here, to see why, it is also crucial to look at the EPRDF-led neo-patrimonial regime's election tactics and why they were clientelist in nature. As Martin Shefter (1977) claims, political parties that consider the economic resources of the state as their own have clientelist tendencies in their electoral appeal. In this regard, it can be seen that the EPRDF-led neo-patrimonial regime in Ethiopia was that kind of clientelist political party not just by looking at and analysing the characters of the elite at the top but by looking at how it is apparently manifested in the institutions they designed and implemented, and in how they altered the development of these same institutions when

their intended consequences seemed to differ from expectations. Jon Abbink describes the character of the regime like this:

There is no doubt that post-1991 Ethiopia saw significant political institution building and that a public ethos of democracy emerged. But the process is still closely controlled by the ruling Tigray People's Liberation Front–Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (TPLF–EPRDF) and has a high ingredient of rhetoric not backed by practice. In conditions of political insecurity and contested legitimacy, a network of political and economic control was built up by this party from its circle of trusted people, loyalists, and former comrades in the armed struggle. Thus, a selective hold on politics and economics in Ethiopia was established.

(Abbink 2006: 174)

As Abbink says, the fact that the TPLF/EPRDF rule brought the “comrades” from the armed movement into direct administration of the new state that they controlled reminds us of what happened when Emperor Menelik II decided to bring the military leaders who had served the state in the fight against colonialism to then administer the newly added territories, more than 100 years ago, showing how the old culture never fades away.

Obviously, what Menelik was doing was consolidating the Ethiopian state of old as it transitioned to a new age following its colonial-era victory. With the TPLF-led EPRDF, however, what had happened was not a consolidation of the state but the consolidation of authoritarian rule at the expense of the state. Irrespective of this, and continuing his assertion, Abbink further argues that such characteristics of the ruling political party in Ethiopia indicate the need to reconsider Ethiopian political culture from the perspective of neo-patrimonialism (Abbink 2006: 176). In this regard, from his study of the 2005 elections in Ethiopia – the most fiercely contested elections in the country's history – Abbink states that the political party in power had to harass civil societies from rural Ethiopia, which paved the way for starting an attack against the property rights of the peasantry who would oppose the government. Moreover, according to the author, “because of state ownership of all land, the political party also periodically redistributed to uproot possible interest groups or entrepreneurs and keep the peasantry dependent” (Abbink 2006: 178).

In a further discussion of the clientelist character of the regime, Leonardo Arriola (2008) argues that Ethiopians who relied on food aid from the government voted for the EPRDF, as the incumbent political party. He also argues, however, that, although the reasons for such voting patterns could not be adequately explained because of the lack of comparable data (given that similar elections had not been held beforehand), the citizens in such food-aid-dependent constituencies “may do so out of their own belief that only the EPRDF can ensure the continuation of such assistance, or local officials may

have suggested that aid would be withdrawn unless they vote for the *EPRDF*” (Arriola 2008: 14). In concurring with Arriola’s argument, a civil servant interviewee who had worked for the Amhara regional state stated that

even the children in schools located across northern Wollo of the Amhara regional state, where he spent most of his time, in fact sing songs of praise for *EPRDF*’s efforts in providing food aid, school supplies. And what is more astounding is that their parents also fear that, if *EPRDF* is to lose power, chances that they continue receiving such economic support would suffer. The *EPRDF* officials, mostly from *TPLF*, fear that north Wollo’s geography, which is conducive and known for folk hero bandits and rebels, is very frightening to the regime; that they always remind the residents in the area not to support any descent in their localities.¹⁴

In line with Arriola’s argument, corroborated by the civil servant in the interview, the ruling coalition did indeed use food aid and other financial or material supports as a way to legitimize the regime’s importance to the ruled. Ryan Jablonski, who also studied the *EPRDF*’s handling of food aid distribution so as to target voters, argues that “the practice of allocating foreign aid for political purposes has a long and sometimes less than savory history. Meles Zenawi’s government in Ethiopia consistently withheld the distribution of foreign aid from families that failed to vote for *EPRDF*” (Jablonski 2014: 295).¹⁵ A Human Rights Watch report also documents systematic bias in the distribution of basic agricultural inputs, such as seed and fertilizer, as well as food aid to opposition supporters (Human Rights Watch 2009).

In the interviews conducted throughout my field research, most also agreed with the argument that, in the food aid programmes managed by the regime, the bureaucrats (who are coalition party members) first identify the regime’s support base that needs (or deserves, to their way of thinking) the food aid. Interviewee 7, in particular, mentioned that, “the regime instructs regional state authorities to conduct public meetings in small towns as well as localities among the peasantry so they could explain who deserves the food aid”. The individual added that

the saddest experience for me is when I had to explain to the deserving poor in small towns and the peasants that, although they were highly impacted by recurrent droughts, the food aid would not arrive to them in time because those localities that had been impacted by the war in the late 1980s were the ones who would receive the aid because of their support for the regime in political power despite the fact that, at the time of receiving the food aid, those localities that had been impacted by the war were not highly impacted by the drought that necessitated the food aid programmes in the first place.¹⁶

From the conversations with the interviewee 7, one can see that, first, the ruling coalition targets areas that are perceived as anti-regime and forbids them from gaining the vital economic aid the localities so deserve, showing the regime governs in a way that benefits its supporters and negatively impact those who could oppose it. Second, the individual clearly stated that the regime's use of food aid in such a way signals its clientelist attributes as well.

Moreover, the regional states also lack the capacity to identify and help their citizens in times of need, mainly because the federal financial distributions to regional states in Ethiopia take place at the discretion of the EPRDF, although the House of Federation, which is the upper house of the parliament, and uses imprecise budget calculations for the distribution of budgetary allocations to the states, was supposed to address these concerns of the regional states. Nonetheless, there is additional evidence that the government uses these financial disbursements to punish and reward voters. In a study that further attempts to understand the mechanics of financial aid distributions in the country, John Ishiyama argues that, "ultimately, resource-allocation and utilization decisions are made by political officials at both the national and regional levels. Thus, there is room for manipulation of disbursements" (Ishiyama (2012: 8). Given such a reality, Ishiyama explains that the ruling party did indeed distribute more money to electoral districts that had supported opposition candidates in the 2005 general election to try and ensure that these districts remained loyal regime supporters. In summarizing his research results, the author states:

At least in the years shortly following the controversial 2005 parliamentary elections in Ethiopia, the EPRDF regime has sought to "buy off" and "appease" districts outside of Addis Ababa that supported the primary opposition party CUD. This finding supports the "appeasement" hypotheses, articulated by Daniel Treisman and others, who have argued that central authorities use federal disbursements to buy off political opponents to maintain the federation and the control of the "party of power" rather than dedicate funds to swing districts or to reward loyal constituents.

(Ishiyama 2012: 19)

As Ishiyama's work indicates, there is ample evidence showing the clientelist characters of the EPRDF regime in Ethiopia in how it rewards patrons and punishes those considered dissenters. What Ishiyama fails to mention, however, is that, although the regional states might seem to have control over the budgets allocated to them, their use of it depends on the regional advisors (mostly loyal TPLF cadres) who participate in the administrative affairs of regional states, while also controlling and reporting every financial expenditure at regional state level, which takes away the administrative powers of the regional states to a large degree. In fact, at times, regional states were also expected to return a third of their budget to the federal Treasury, which would then transfer it to the regional state of Tigray, administered by the TPLF.

In general, although the regime's attempts to acquire political legitimacy influenced the ruling party to focus its efforts on establishing a federal arrangement to accommodate the question of political equality via fair representation, and economic reforms that empower various groups, all its clientelist behaviour achieved was to expose its primary agenda, which is revealed as staying in power at all costs. Among other things, the regime's failure to meet its defined goals of political representation (which is discussed in general in Part 2 of the book) gives rise to a dysfunctional federal arrangement, which opens the door to the further evolution and spread of the clientelist practices that harm the validity of any administrative intent and any commitment the regime might have towards democratization.

This discussion of the neo-patrimonial regime's clientelist actions – with regard to electoral issues that range from its design of an electoral system that is ill-advised for a multi-ethnic nation, and that resulted in the failure of the fair representation schemes, to the creation and implementation of a bureaucracy that, ultimately, serves the patron–client relations of the new political elites, and to the use of food aid as a political instrument and the undemocratic ways that it relies in repressing its own democratic openings – all indicate how the EPRDF coalition, tightly controlled by the TPLF and its patrons among the regional elites, failed to realize the potential for democratic consolidation in the last couple of decades of the country's history. With the regional elites adhering to party discipline and the principle of staying in power, their agenda of creating a one-party monopoly had therefore fully materialized in the Ethiopian state until the end of this coalition was signalled when Ethiopia's current prime minister, Abiy Ahmed, formed the Prosperity Party and the TPLF restricted itself to being a regional power in the state of Tigray.

Conclusion

In the next two chapters, the book presents the literature review on authoritarian survival in general and the debate with regard to the pros and cons of ethnic federalism in particular. It also discusses the debate on individual rights versus group rights, which the Ethiopian political and intellectual elites have argued over for a long time in terms of selecting the most appropriate approach for addressing the age-old issues of political and economic inequality.

So far, this work has also explained that the political culture embedded in the Ethiopian state – with regard to patterns of elite interaction – and the modes of political operation have stayed mostly unaltered for more than 100 years of the country's history, and remain the most foundational part of the explanations for authoritarian survival in the country. Indeed, the formation of the modern Ethiopian modern state can be attributed to the early reformers relying on their relations based on kinship and loyalty, bringing the elites from within their close circle together, and thus cementing their rule for decades at a time.

Although there is no credible evidence to back up the allegations directed at these former leaders, mostly the Amhara, of benefiting their ethnic groups at the expense of others within the Ethiopian state, it is very clear, however, that all the political regimes of the modern era have failed to fully address the political and economic grievances in the country. The various reforms undertaken by these regimes also lacked uniformity, and mostly served the interest of the political elite and those who already had substantial political and economic power at the centre, in Addis Ababa. Such failures, in terms of lacking a legal framework to address these issues, would be manifested throughout the political spectrum and led to the emergence of competing ethnic and national interests that resulted in the breakout of damaging civil wars, badly managed droughts that led to famines, and a history of irresponsible governance that, in turn, led to the reinforcement of authoritarian tendencies and the emergence of a vicious political cycle, which continues to define the contemporary Ethiopian state.

The historical analysis presented in the last two chapters, focusing on the political culture of the Ethiopian state in terms of elite interaction, institutional reforms, and the role of the strategic interests of the political elite, shows that today's challenges are the same problems that have been evident throughout the most important periods of the modern era. Such explanations, regardless of their contribution to opening our eyes to the current challenges, cannot be considered full-fledged answers to the challenges of authoritarian politics in today's Ethiopia, however.

As a result, detailed examinations of the institutional reforms that define contemporary Ethiopia, and how such institutional reforms might have contributed to reinforcing the political culture of the state and the survivalist agenda of the political elite of the now departed TPLF-led EPRDF, need to be presented. Part 2 of this project endeavours to do just that, starting at Chapter 6, where an attempt is made to provide a wider assessment of the Ethiopian model of ethnic federalism and how the design and implementation of it effectively contributed to our understanding of authoritarian survival in the country.

Notes

- 1 The famously circulated short article by a young student, Walelign Mekonnen, represents a symbolic and historic alliance between the Amharas, mostly considered privileged, and ethnic groups then considered oppressed.
- 2 According to Zewde (1991) and Marcus (1994), the emperor's acts in raising the salaries of the bureaucracy and the military can be categorized as last-ditch attempts by the monarchy to appease those in revolt. Unfortunately for the monarchy, none of the solutions were effective in taming the mutinies.
- 3 For more on the issue, see Marcus (1994: 189–192).
- 4 The question of nationalities has, unfortunately, continued to guide political debates from the time of the student movement in the imperial era to more recently; see Kebede (1999).

- 5 Interviewee 7 was a civil servant who served both Haile Selassie and the Dergue in its first few years.
- 6 The TPLF, in the initial stages of its anti-government struggle, had published a “Manifesto” detailing its political goals as the group waged its armed resistance, representing the political disappointments of the Tigrayan elites. Although the document allegedly speaks for all Tigrayans, there is no substantive evidence proving that. The document, among others, mentions the “Amhara” as the enemy of Tigrayans, and thus their dominance had to be ended. Moreover, it also chronicles that, after the downfall of Emperor Yohannes IV and the coming to power of Emperor Menelik II of Shewa Amhara, the influence of the Tigrayan elites declined in the Ethiopian state. Thus, the TPLF leaders insisted that this had to be corrected. For more, see the Tigray People’s Liberation Front political manifesto, published in February 1968.
- 7 Most of the founders of the Oromo Liberation Front who once championed secession from Ethiopia have abandoned this goal over the last few years.
- 8 Gudina’s work shows that, despite the so called “grand failures” in the varying political regimes, and the road blocks that emerged remaining a challenge, the creative ways of the Tigrayan elite, with their understanding of the minority status, in fact might have saved the nation from possible disintegration. For more, see Gudina (2002).
- 9 Chapter 6 of the book assesses and explains political clientelism in the country more broadly and discusses where the constitution went wrong.
- 10 Interviewee 4 served the Amhara national regional state in different capacities, notably as a member of the region’s Cabinet.
- 11 Interviewee 11 served the regional states of Amhara and Benishangul-Gumuz in different capacities. The individual, who told the interviewer about his positions, did not explain why he was able to work in two different regions despite the fact that he was Amhara ethnically, however.
- 12 Interviewee 8 had worked for both Oromia national regional state, in the city of Adama (formerly Nazareth), and the federal government in Addis Ababa.
- 13 What Goodnow and Moser (2012) refer to as “majority-minority” districts are localities that are dominated by demographically larger groups even though the administrative positions in the local levels of government are held by minorities. Regional states such as Harari and Benishangul-Gumuz are good examples.
- 14 Interviewee 14, who had worked for the Amhara national regional state, had also lived in the northern part of the region (the Wollo area), bordering the Tigray region to the north.
- 15 Meles Zenawi was the president of Ethiopia in the provisional government (1991–1994) and served as prime minister of Ethiopia and chairman of the EPRDF until his death in 2012.
- 16 This individual, interviewee 7, has worked for the federal government’s agency that deals with emergency management and preparedness.

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4 Authoritarian survival and ethnic federalism

The literature

Introduction

Why authoritarian regimes elect to design some seemingly democratic institutions or adopt attributes that make them look like a democratizing state while their authoritarian tendencies and characters remain intact is a hotly debated question. There is always room for further attempts to arrive at full-fledged explanations, though. Beyond this assertion, however, there is already a substantial, albeit not yet complete, account in comparative politics literature explaining what leads to the survival in political power of authoritarian regimes. In the first section of the discussion of the literature, therefore, I look at several contemporary works that contribute to an understanding of the politics of authoritarian survival. Two crucial points stand out in the majority of these works. The idea of institutional solutions as mechanisms employed by governing elites or political parties comes first, and elite-centred politics and the mechanisms utilized in different forms of power-sharing mechanisms among the ruling elite is the other. In this respect, the book discusses the literature on authoritarian survival in the hope that it will add a further contribution to our understanding of how both institutions and the rational choices of the political elites play critical roles in authoritarian survival. In more particular ways, the literature on both authoritarian survival and discussion on how the debates on ethnic federalism present the political elite's choices of institutional settings might have contributed to the decades-long survival of today's political incumbents in Ethiopian politics. Ultimately, as much of the discussion now focuses on the EPRDF's resilience and or survival for some 28 years, one might argue that Ethiopia's political elites today do not represent the EPRDF coalition given the emergence of a new national party that replaced the former; the fact that today's elites indeed emerged through the EPRDF coalitions' party structure makes a compelling case that the present incumbents are comparable to the old elites at least in terms of their resolve to keep the federal setting, which this work discusses in general.

In discussing the literature on authoritarian survival, however, the goal here is to show whether the discussion on Ethiopia's old regimes or the

penultimate regime of the EPRDF really fit the discussions in the field or whether students of comparative politics just have to admit that some sub-Saharan states, such as Ethiopia, could just be idiosyncratic and need careful and unique assessments. Most debates on the issue of authoritarian survival or resilience have indeed evolved, and the ways in which such concepts are defined have also been expanding (Frantz 2018; Geddes, Wright, & Frantz 2014; Cheibub, Gandhi, & Vreeland 2010). But this chapter's discussions start with Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way's (2010) recent work, which assesses "competitive but authoritarian" states with substantial theoretical detail. The authors expound the rationale for political survival by utilizing domestic as well as international variables. Ethiopia's location close to the highly strategic Red Sea and at the heart of the Horn of Africa makes it a very attractive state for competing global powers.

Discussions on authoritarian survival

Levitsky and Way's main argument is that states with close relations with the developed and democratic world (mostly Western countries) tend to democratize while states with strong and oppressive structures tend to remain authoritarian. In fact, relating such an assertion to Ethiopian history, support is found for the notion that close relations with the Soviet empire on the part of the Dergue, the dictatorial regime that ruled the state from 1974 to 1991, might have reinforced its authoritarian character, and that it was amenable to such influence. The fact that a scholarly work such as Levitsky and Way's helps explain the survival of this regime given the political and military support from the Soviets until the late 1980s does not, however, mean that it captures the whole story. Indeed, the fact that a certain regime did not submit itself to a competitive electoral setting, conspicuous by its absence throughout the Dergue's regime, is one issue to be considered. Moreover, looking at the many historical attributes of different regimes in a broader sense is another important factor that could bring about the whole story. The political regime led by the EPRDF coalition indeed showcases electoral politics, albeit not in terms of a fair contest. In fairness to Levitsky and Way's argument, the EPRDF's coalition, with the dominance of the TPLF elites, also enjoyed a wide degree of Western political support, even though it remained authoritarian and devoid of a level playing field for electoral competition. Although the authors' argument on the use of the coercive powers of the state in helping authoritarian survival could also explain the case of Ethiopia, its contribution will be limited, however, since the factors helping the EPRDF were in fact much more than its domination of the country's security apparatus and the government's weak but working monopoly of violence. Regardless of the contribution from such seminal works for the overall understanding of authoritarian survival, therefore, it remains imperative that we learn more of those different cases that do not fit into Levitsky and Way's explanation, while also essaying explanations predicated upon different methodological approaches.

Levitsky and Way define competitive authoritarian regimes as

civilian regimes in which formal democratic institutions exist and are widely viewed as the primary means of gaining power, but in which incumbents' abuse of the state places them at a significant advantage vis-à-vis their opponents. Such regimes are competitive in that opposition parties use democratic institutions to seriously contest for political power, but they are not democratic because the playing field is heavily skewed in favor of incumbents. Competition is thus real but unfair.

(Levitsky & Way 2010: 5)

Their definition is a comprehensive attempt on the topic and still concurs with the notion of a lack of democratic competition – or, as they say, the presence of “skewed competition in favor of the ruling political parties”. It is vital to reiterate, however, that, despite comprehensive theoretical contributions, the work still falls short of addressing various political regimes that have closed the level playing field for political competition in broader ways. The case of Ethiopia is one of these examples. In the six periodic elections since 1992 in the country, for instance, both the processes leading up to the voting and then the counting of the election results were challenging to the prospects of the opposition parties, given their grave concerns over an electoral process that they regarded as lacking any attributes of what an equal playing field should be. Here, it is crucial to keep in mind that Levitsky and Way's explanations are centred on the idea of democratic institutions and the elite's manipulation of such seemingly representative bodies for their goals of political survival. This assertion indeed reinforces the argument that this work puts forward, namely that elites' strategic interests and the institutions matter in equal measure.

In another seminal work, entitled *Voting for Autocracy*, Beatriz Magaloni (2006) focuses on the successful and prolonged hold on political power in Mexico by the Institutional Revolutionary Party (Partido Revolucionario Institucional: PRI). The author argues that the importance of electoral fraud as an explanation for authoritarian survival is subject to serious doubt. Instead, Magaloni states that Mexico's PRI was successful in making sure that no one in the top stratum of political power in the party dominated clientelistic rents; and this became effective in creating “opportunities” for all members of the top party brass, thanks to the decentralized distribution of rents across the many individual party members who hold political power in the country. Moreover, the author also mentions Barbara Geddes' (1999) work, which explains authoritarian survival on the basis of the elites' propensity to stay together, given the high costs of defection, and argues that autocratic parties' domination of popular support can be strengthened by effectively deceiving voters through the covering up of a party's dictatorial attributes and by abusing the seemingly democratic institutions and simple electoral manoeuvres.

Assessing Magaloni's work in light of the Ethiopian case and finding parallels seems quite feasible, given the nature of the EPRDF-coalition-led regime in the country and its clientelistic networks within the top levels of the party. Nevertheless, in the case of Ethiopia, the rents that the elite collect mostly remain within the top brass. Making such an assumption is possible because the institutional manoeuvres of the ethnic federal arrangement mean that there are few if any checks on party leaders. This is mainly a result of the fact that lower-level EPRDF officials strictly follow what is referred as the ruling coalition's party discipline, as we will see in the discussions in Part 2 of the book. This reality has also kept lower-level party officials out of the "riches" that come with being part of the top of a ruling regime.

The catch in the Ethiopian case, however, is that the middle- and lower-level party members receive rents in the form of administrative corruption at the lower levels of local government that they are in charge of managing, which the party elites at the top look at with blind eyes and deaf ears. The government bureaucracy is broadly assessed in Part 2, and we can see that the government structure is massively dominated by political parties. Therefore, party members dominate government structures, and then there is no surprise that elites at lower and middle levels of party organizations collect rents in the form of administrative corruption. After all, the party is in charge of the state, and the government is the reflection of the party.

Regardless of how different Magaloni's explanations are compared with the Ethiopian case, the effort made by the author is indeed exemplary in its study of history and its attempt to evaluate the PRI through a historical lens, as well as the theoretical richness the author's discussion possesses. First, however, when applied to wider sets of cases, it falls short of explaining authoritarian survival in multi-ethnic states; this is mostly the case within sub-Saharan Africa, an area where variables from history, political culture, ethnic conflicts, structural factors, and institutional issues have a lot of explanatory power. Second, the main argument of Magaloni's work, despite its richness in its summary of the literature and theoretical considerations, is formulated on the basis of a single case study that is not quite a multi-ethnic state, which runs contrary to most sub-Saharan African states, which are mostly highly diverse. Therefore, although it remains a significant piece, showing how incumbent political parties can effectively use the institutional systems they design and establish to prolong their political power by delving deep in assessing the PRI, Magaloni's attempt remains inadequate in terms of taking us further towards an understanding of authoritarian survival based on a broader spectrum of cases. Here, it is also vital to reiterate that Magaloni's work, like Levitsky and Way's, looks at the institutional patterns of interaction within political parties such as the PRI, which the author asserts contribute immensely to reinforcing the importance of party institutions for the purpose of understanding authoritarian survival; and this, in the end, makes such contributions even more important.

Looking at another contemporary work, which focuses on authoritarian regimes in the Middle East, a region that presents some similarities to sub-Saharan Africa, Michael Herb's (1999) book shows that the Gulf monarchies have centralized political power among the royal family; and, as a result, close relatives of the ruling elite have been able to successfully ensure their survival for extended periods, while other authoritarian regimes in the Middle East and north Africa have struggled to maintain their rule, given their experiences of periodic (though prolonged) revolutions and regime changes at different times. From the perspective of this project, since the Ethiopian regime in particular is also blamed for concentrating political power along ethnic lines, and given the Tigrayan political elites' successful manipulation of the institutions in the Ethiopian state, creating a concentration of Tigrayan elites in many ministerial portfolios and important institutions, Herb's work creates another important parallel for furthering our understanding of the puzzle of authoritarian survival in broader sets of cases.

Here, although Gulf monarchies concentrate power along family and, to some extent, clan lines, we see that the EPRDF-led political regime in Ethiopia, which was highly dominated by the TPLF political elites until 2018, garnered most political powers by effectively dominating the military and security institutions, as well as command of the economy. This begs the question of how it is possible, in a multi-ethnic state such as Ethiopia, for a political regime to stay in power for almost three decades despite the fact that its support is derived from just a single minority ethnic group in the country and its co-opted elites elsewhere. More broadly, however, Herb's work clearly identifies the patterns in power succession mechanisms in Middle Eastern monarchies and beyond, which again provides a perspective for discussing political succession mechanisms in Ethiopia. In addition, in Ethiopia's older regimes before the EPRDF, succession and power distribution mechanisms were orchestrated along family lines and political loyalty, and, to a certain extent, across ethnic lines as well.

Summing up what has been gleaned thus far in light of some of the contemporary works in comparative politics, institutions and the strategic interests of the elite and their patterns of interactions remain the most compelling explanations for understanding authoritarian survival in general. Nonetheless, to add to the most important works discussed above, Milan Svolik (2012) presents a further fascinating explanation to the politics of authoritarianism and survival mechanisms in this type of rule. Svolik argues that explanations on the topic are primarily centred on two themes: the politics of the ruling elite as it pertains to the ruled "masses"; and the politics of the elite vis-à-vis each other.

The author's overall argument when looked at from the perspective of African politics is even more significant. Svolik argues that

whether and how dictators resolve the problems of power-sharing and control is shaped by two distinctly dismal features of authoritarian

politics. First, dictatorships inherently lack an independent authority with the power to enforce agreements among key political actors, especially the dictator, his allies, and their repressive agents. Second, violence is an ever-present and ultimate arbiter of conflicts in authoritarian politics. These two intrinsic features uniquely shape the conduct of politics in dictatorships. They limit the role that political institutions can plausibly play in resolving the problems of power-sharing and control, and they explain the gruesome manner in which so many dictators and dictatorships fall.

(Svolik 2012: 2–3)

As explained earlier about the violent history of the Ethiopian state in terms of decades-old civil wars, ruling political elites are highly concerned, first, to address the challenges they have among themselves, given that the politics of power sharing is an ever-present dilemma for each other's survival. Once such an issue is addressed via mechanisms such as inter-party agreements and coalition politics, the elites will turn towards the second important challenge, which is addressing the popular demand for political and economic equality. Regardless of any weaknesses arising from some parsimonious explanations in his work, overall Svolik's contribution helps provide a different lens for looking at sub-Saharan states such as Ethiopia, by analysing the political elite and how they are able to design ways to mitigate the dangers that challenge their political dominance.

Despite the presence of overarching explanations for authoritarian survival in the sea of literature in comparative politics thus far, this work has opted to focus on select cases above, not because they are directly in line with the arguments provided in this project but as their contributions in one way or another have helped shape some of the arguments in this work. Moreover, the select texts analysed above not only present compelling accounts of theoretical foundations but have also had great influence on my training when it comes to understanding the literature in authoritarian survival in a broad sense. Nonetheless, given the goals set for this project, particularly in Part 2 of the book, this work assesses the institutional solution of the ethnic model of federalism in Ethiopia, and how exactly that has aided the political elites' quest for political survival. In this regard, the following part of the discussion in this chapter presents the literature on ethnic federalism and presents perspectives that help understand why, in the minds of the EPRDF elites, ethnic federalism became the choice.

Discussions on ethnic federalism

So far, this chapter's select contemporary explanations for our understanding of authoritarian survival show that institutions and the strategic choices of the political elite matter in equal measure. Before delving deeper into exploring the role of the ruling political elites, however, and how they stage-managed

a method for political survival in the country by designing an institutional framework – i.e., the ethnic federal arrangement – it is essential to explore how the regime thought it could satisfy (if at all) diverse interests across many ethnic groups. Moreover, it is also vital to look into how the EPRDF regime attempted to ensure stability and secure effective control of the state in addition to providing power-sharing mechanisms among the groups and the elites that represented them. At the centre of all such ambitions, we find ethnic federalism as the regime's solution. First, however, as can be seen throughout this work, especially for the TPLF-led elites within the recently departed EPRDF, ethnic federalism addresses the problems of the country's past, especially with regard to the question of political and economic inequality, which goes as far back as the student movement from Emperor Haile Selassie I's era. Second, it leads to the emergence of a political mechanism that ensures the survival of Tigrayan elites, who had dominated the EPRDF for more than two decades and who had no other avenue of staying in power apart from acting as the brokers and schemers of Ethiopian politics sitting in between the country's two largest groups, the Amhara and Ethiopian Oromos.

This work presents ethnic federalism as the central explanation for the political survival of a political coalition (the EPRDF) that, in large part, was heavily dominated by a liberation front representing a minority ethnic group, the TPLF. Given such an assertion, it is important to broadly discuss what the literature has to say about ethnic federal arrangement across a spectrum of topics in ethnic studies and ethnic nationalism. Before detailing the comparative politics literature in ethnic federalism, it is also essential to explain the concept of federalism in general, as well as the definition of ethnic federalism in particular.

Federalism implies the distribution of power across the various levels of government, with sets of principles ranging from checks and balances to the separation of powers, with some guarantee of such autonomy of each level of government in its own sphere (Riker 1964; Clark 2001; Verney 1995; Filippov, Ordeshook, & Shvetsova 2004; Bulman-Pozen 2012). Federalism can take different shapes and forms. In fact, many forms of federalism have been mentioned, and one certainly is ethnic federalism. Nicole Herther-Spiro defines ethnic federalism as “an attempt to create a territorial solution to ethnic conflict by acknowledging the need to grant some degree of autonomy to ethnic groups within a state but attempts to do so without complete secession of one group or another from the state” (Herther-Spiro 2007: 329).

In Ethiopia, the TPLF elite successfully sold the idea of such a model as the only institutional design with solutions for the overarching questions in elites' relationship with the ruled as well as within themselves as they aspired to cement their leadership as legitimate representatives of the constituencies. The explanations in the literature of ethnic federalism therefore focus on the rationale behind the EPRDF-led regime's adoption of such a federal model in the first place. The review of the debates on ethnic federalism also shows, among other things, topics of contention in the study of federalism,

such as the issue of federalism on national unity, solutions to ethnic conflicts, political representation, and economic equality, with a focus on the diverse explanations as to why ethnic federalism is applauded by some and criticized by many in Ethiopia.

Ethnic federalism and national unity

Rhetorically, the regime in Ethiopia considers ethnic federalism as a cornerstone for the establishment of political unity; practically, however, it looks at the arrangement as an economic union of unneighbourly ethnic groups. Scholars who hold that ethnic federalism is good for constructing or reconstructing national unity argue that an ethnic federal arrangement indeed serves as a solution to put an end to “the suppression” of ethnic diversity in multi-ethnic states while also leading to the termination of major ethnic group domination over minorities. Hence, for some scholars in this line of thought, ethnic federalism discourages ordered or vertical relationships between various ethnic groups. Therefore, they argue that, as it addresses ethnic oppression by providing solutions in the form of self-governance, it also paves a way to build strong national unity and national integration (Fiseha 2012; Agbodike 1998; Aalen 2006; Jinadu 2002).

In their assessments of multi-ethnic federal states such as Ethiopia and Nigeria, Assefa Fiseha (2012) and C. C. Agbodike (1998), in particular, argue that, for most ethnic groups, ethnic federalism also offers a credible way to maintain national unity in the face of ethnic division. They further emphasize that the ethnic form of federal system contributes to ethnic groups’ way of preserving their own identity while creating political legitimacy as well as strengthening their commitment to national unity (Fiseha 2012). The problems in the Ethiopian case, as broadly presented in the upcoming chapters, are that the ethnic groups with their allotment of self-governing rights are unable to exercise their administrative rights but were made to serve the interests of the political elite at the centre, from the EPRDF’s headquarters in Addis Ababa.

Rotimi Suberu (2001) refutes the above school of thought, however, and argues that ethnic federalism does not support the process of building political unity. According to Suberu, it is almost impossible to give every minority ethnic group the right to self-administer its own state or region just for the purpose of ending one’s perceived ethnic dominance over another. Suberu contends that an ethnic minority might still face suppression of its rights by a majority ethnic group in the same regional state in cases of a given regional administration or a state formed with multi-ethnic societies. Moreover, he also stresses that the continuation of ethnic suppression endangers efforts to strengthen national unity, and thus believes that, to form a federal structure that is instrumental in building a unified nation, the creation of geographically organized subnational states – as opposed to ethnically based federalism – is the better alternative.

Furthermore, Suberu also argues that, in a nation with an ethnic model of federalism as its form of government, political elites in federal states disrupt the principles of national unity by placing greater emphasis on ethnic and religious differences in order to get the support and trust of the ethnic groups they represent, and thus end up receiving the most political support for their rule by sowing the seeds of religious and ethnic division. Moreover, such trends by the political elite could also negatively affect the level of tolerance between ethnic groups, as well as challenge the “equilibrium” between unity and democracy that is necessary for the federal structure’s survival (Steves 2003). In this respect, Valerie Bunce (2004) also argues that, unlike other forms of federalism, ethnically arranged models of federalism can in fact enhance nationalist or secessionist movements in the long term, and that could further negatively impact efforts to support the growth and revival of some level of national unity in the future.

Effects of ethnic federalism on economic equality

The TPLF-led EPRDF regime in Ethiopia also considered such a federal model as a way to decrease economic inequality across ethnic groups, on the assumption that the one or few groups that had had historical political dominance were perceived to have had greater control of most of the wealth in the country. As multi-ethnic states attempt to address issues of economic inequality and wealth distribution among different ethnic groups, newly constituted governments could consider, among other things, the ethnic form of federalism. Here, the goal is to narrow an already existing gap in development and economic growth trajectories that exists across various ethnic groups and the localities that these groups occupy. Hence, by planning symmetric and fair development strategies for ethnically formed regional states, the political elites believe that a reduction in economic inequality might be achieved. It is also vital to note that those who plan such economic reforms are mainly not the newly minted regional states, in the case of Ethiopia, but the federal government at the centre, which continues to be the most powerful political entity. Scholars in this line of thought, however, argue that ethnic federalism is also a way to assist and encourage the different levels of government in multi-ethnic states to lead development strategies in the regions they administer and have their own initiatives and levels of independence in terms of formulating policies on economic development and growth. Besides, according to the authors from this school of thought, ethnic federalism can also increase central and regional governments’ capacities to carry out their responsibilities more effectively than a more centralized form of government structure could offer in the realm of political economy (Keller 2002).

Moreover, by taking Nigeria as an instance, Gabriel Olowononi (1998) ties the growing inequality between different ethnic groups to rising inter-group tensions and among the main causes of ethnic conflict. Hence, Olowononi argues that ethnic federalism could help ensure equitable wealth distribution

and allow minorities to receive a fair share of revenue allocation from the national breadbasket, which will in turn assist in decreasing inter-ethnic tensions. Raymond Fisman and Roberta Gatti (2002), who studied a large sample study of federal states, also argue that federalism encourages decentralization in government outflows and development programmes. This economic decentralization, therefore, may be significantly associated with lower levels of corruption and higher economic growth and equality among different groups.

Bringing the issue of political ideology in developed federal systems into the fold, however, Nathan Kelly and Christopher Witko (2012), by highlighting the United States' efforts to reduce inequality, contend that ideological divides make it difficult for central governments (with federal systems) to fight inequality. They say this because, in established democracies with a federal structure (such as the United States, although the country's federal setting is mostly geographic, and reminiscent of state formation from colonial times and continental America's westward expansion), political parties possess ideological divides and demonstrate why the central government or state governments should have stronger political powers. Indeed, in the US case, federalism is neither ethnically or linguistically based; the argument in the "state versus nation" rivalry goes in similar ways across many federal cases, however, whether the models are constructed along ethnic lines or not. According to Kelly and Witko, regional governments will benefit from the devolution of power for putting their efforts into reducing inequality across the country. Suberu (2001) suggests, however, that, given that most regional states do not have the capacity to undertake development or governance efforts on their own, their dependence on the central government will remain substantial to some level. For him, ethnic federalism is not therefore prone to spark economic growth or inventiveness.

Suberu (2006), in another work, also explains that ethnic federalism does not necessarily lead to economic equality, on account of administrative ineffectiveness, corruption, and political patronage at regional state levels. By taking Nigeria as an example, he argues that the existence of high levels of difference between the various states in terms of capacity building, bureaucratic inefficiency, and levels of corruption of different forms can influence the central government to centralize the country's economy even further, and take away the ethnically arranged administrative units' capability to have a say in developing and implementing economic programmes. Hence, Suberu stresses that the probability and reality of relying on subnationally led economic planning to correct the discrepancies that federalism might create is very important.

In addition to administrative challenges at local levels, Daniel Treisman (2000) also notes that the ethnic form of federalism can indeed be more corrupt, as it creates a huge challenge in terms of the central government's efforts to control the rent-seeking problems that are tied to political patronage. Merera Gudina (2002), who looked at the elites' quest to form the ethnic

federal arrangement in the case of Ethiopia, also argues that the notion that such federal design helps efforts by the state in wealth distribution is flawed. According to Gudina, the way the Ethiopian regional states are designed, on the basis of ethnic and linguistic lines, shows that part of a population in a given ethnic state can somehow be detached from other populations from different ethnic groups even though it has long-standing historic and economic ties with them.¹

In further adding to the criticism of the ethnic federal arrangement in terms of its attributes for helping reduce economic inequality, by relying on his case study of Ethiopia, Alemante Gebre-Selassie (2003) also argues that, in order to evaluate ethnic federalism's effectiveness in lowering economic inequality, one needs to look at how it affects economic development first. Gebre-Selassie argues that ethnic federalism has the potential to restrict citizens' mobility (which, according to him, restricts the labor market) and the flow of goods, services, and capital across subnational localities that are devised according to ethnic and linguistic lines. He contends that, as a result of such restrictions, the ethnic model of federalism in fact undermines the economic notion of a common market. Furthermore, Gebre-Selassie also stresses that, in a given ethnic federal structure, vast differences in human and natural resources separate ethnic groups despite the fact that such groups can now self-administer their regional states on their own. Hence, although some ethnic groups may be well endowed with, say, petroleum or diamonds, or reside in economically important cities or ports, other ethnic groups could well lack these economic resources or elements that are critical for economic growth and development. Therefore, he concludes that ethnic federalism has the potential to widen inequality across many groups.

In fact, from the breadth of cases that this book presents in Part 2, we see that the central government in Ethiopia interferes readily in the so-called "developing" regional states by asserting that such units lack the necessary administrative capability to, essentially, administer themselves in an effective manner. Certainly, the interference of the political elites at the centre in regional states' political affairs is constant across all regions. Nevertheless, although assisting so-called "developing states" in terms of helping them build capacities is all well and good, the fact that such "supportive efforts" are still to be seen even after two decades raises a whole host of questions.

Ethnic federalism and ethnic conflicts

The third objective that the EPRDF coalition had in mind in constituting the Ethiopian state along ethnic and linguistic lines was the notion that ethnic federalism could serve as a solution in diminishing ethnic conflicts. Although this features as the third rationale by the strategic EPRDF elites in adopting the ethnic federal model to constitute the Ethiopian state, the issue of addressing the violent past and ending the recurrent ethnic conflicts was not achieved in practice. This can be seen in the various conflicts witnessed

within the Southern regional state (formally known as the Southern Nations, Nationalities and People's Region) and the recurring conflicts across the Somali, Oromia, Benishangul-Gumuz, and Amhara regional states, which at times are considered to have been incited by those political elites at the centre for their political gain (these are explained in more detail in the next chapters in Part 2 of the book). Such conflicts have led to the internal displacement of millions of Ethiopians and massacres based on ethnic identities.

When it comes to the issue of addressing ethnic conflicts by devising a framework of ethnic federalism, Suberu (2006), despite his criticism of the model in other areas, credits such a model with helping to reduce ethnic violence, despite some flaws in a multi-ethnic state such as Nigeria, which he has extensively studied – a country that has hundreds of ethno-linguistic groups. Suberu argues, “Ethnic federalism has emerged as the primary organizing principle for conceptualizing and promoting collective interest in Nigeria” (Suberu 2006: 77). Furthermore, when administrative power is in the hands of minority ethnic groups with the central government promoting the collective interest, he states that there is less risk of enmity towards each other.

In most ethnically diverse states, the goal in preferring ethnic federalism to other forms of government seems to come up with a design that balances and accommodates the diverse interests of the ethnic groups, thereby diminishing the emergence of ethnic conflicts arising from the political oppression of a certain group by another. Among other factors associated with ethnic federalism's role in conflict reduction is the decentralization of authority to regional states. Moreover, some also explain that the political empowerment that comes with decentralization policies can serve as a basis for power sharing between different ethnic groups, which helps to lower political tension and hostility and substantially reduce ethnic violence. Scholars in this line of thought stress that, under ethnic federalism, previously suppressed ethnic minorities will also obtain rights of self-administration, with all the rights and duties that come with it. In addition, the scholars contend that this form of federal structure raises the level of awareness about the need to promote inter-group tolerance, which is very effective in restraining groups from being attracted to ethnic conflicts to solve divisions across regional and group interests (Lijphart 1977; Suberu 2006; Brancati 2008).

Contrary to the assertions mentioned above, however, some suggest that ethnic federalism does not help reduce ethnic conflicts. They argue that the political and economic powers that come with ethnic federalism influence ethnic federal states to pass laws and take actions that discriminate against other ethnic groups. Although this is partly because of the nature of ethnic federalism, in giving power for ethnic political elites that prioritize group-focused self-interests, certain conflicts could also emerge because of the emergence of competition between ethnic groups to control power within the central government and its decision-making processes (Sambanis & Shayo 2013; Ciepley 2013; Jinadu 1985; Dikshit 1975). Furthermore, some also argue that such economic and political empowerment of ethnic groups could further induce

secessionist agendas by some ethnic groups, potentially leading to instability and ethnic strife with those ethnic groups seeking national unity. Affirming the notion that ethnic federalism encourages secessionist conflicts, some also further mention that, in cases such as that of Indonesia, which has linguistically, ethnically, and religiously fragmented societies, their citizens still have anti-federalism views because of their memory of secessionist ethnic conflicts at the end of the Dutch colonial rule and the violence that emerged when federalism was first put to the test (Erk & Anderson 2009).

Ethnic federalism and democratic governance

Finally, the EPRDF-led regime in Ethiopia also used the rationale that ethnic federalism ultimately will help the growth of democratic governance. When we look at the literature from this perspective, Diane Orentlicher (1998) reflects on two basic views of democracy that will help legitimize ethnic federalism. The first view is that this form of government most likely secures the interests of the majority of people who are under the federal government's administration. In this respect, Orentlicher states that ethnic federalism offers the best institutional framework to collectively answer questions that are reflected in the interests of the members of an ethnic group (those who are more interested and call for prioritizing a group rights agenda) and for promoting democratic governance. Her argument can be understood better when we think of a multi-ethnic state and the presence of diverse political interests that will be better served through federal arrangements that provide self-administration rights. The second view of democracy, according to Orentlicher, is that the idea of republicanism offers support to ethnic federalism. According to this view, ethnic federalism creates an enabling environment whereby citizens can consider the commonalities across inter-group relations and throughout public deliberations. According to her, republicanism calls for the protection of people's unalienable rights from being voted out and their rights potentially suppressed, as they could be eventually dominated by majority groups.

In this regard, ethnic federalism provides a fitting framework for promoting the necessary debates and achieving consensus about the common good at the subunit level. After all, federalism is about the devolution of political power across different levels in generally balanced ways. Thus, the fact that a certain ethnic group is in charge of its own region or regional state – and the citizens in such a defined territory share similar history, values and traditions – implies that, based on such a federal arrangement, the government could more easily extend the same rights across various groups. The other claim that attempts to legitimize ethnic federalism in this respect is the belief that an individual citizen is more likely to participate in the affairs of his or her community or ethnic group than in the affairs of the national community, and that increases political participation more effectively (Gebre-Selassie 2003). Alemante Gebre-Selassie's argument, in particular, can be attributed to the

widely supported notion in the Ethiopian political discourse that most ethnic groups' political participation in the past was very limited mainly because of the imposition of the central government's powers on the many minorities. Hence, through such a federal arrangement formed along ethnic lines, both individuals and groups can have a political say in governance matters. This is highly contested, however, as individual rights in Ethiopia are highly oppressed, with the EPRDF coalition mostly focused on prioritizing group rights at the expense of individual rights.

In a different view that also considers ethnic federalism as appealing for democratic ideals, some argue that, to determine whether any form of federalism will be suitable for democracy, it is crucial to look at the concept of federalism in general and its historic effect in politics in particular. From its inception, federalism has answered the question of representation and has provided power-sharing mechanisms since the period following the American Revolution. Federalism's effects in politics in terms of its limitation of the scope of governmental actions, the fact that it increases the number of veto players, its creation of multiple avenues for political organization and mobilization, and how it distributes power between regions and political actors are also what, among other things, make this form of government conducive to democracy and efforts at checks and balances (Gibson 2004; Beer 1978).

Nevertheless, some still contend that federalism is not necessarily democratic. For instance, Allan Blakeney (1994) argues that states form themselves into federal systems because they do not wish those groups with a majority in certain states to prevail in the ethnically arranged administrative units' political governance and decision-making process across many issues. Hence, Blakeney argues that ethnic federalism harms the voice of the majority in political decision-making processes because of federal administrative frameworks' generous equal emphasis to all represented groups. As a result, in an example of messy politics, the majority interest may be very limited, which comes at the cost of the very notion of the concept of democracy. In another argument that challenges the role of ethnic federalism with regard to democratic consolidation, Alvin Rabushka and Kenneth Shepsle (1972) argue that federalism devised according to ethnic arrangement is not particularly effective for efforts at building democratic institutions. According to them, in multi-ethnic societies, in which ethnicity is an ever-present question, democracy becomes less feasible or practical. As a result, this eventually and inevitably impacts democratic consolidation significantly, mainly because government efforts to build inter-ethnic alliances to meet various political, economic, and social objectives will face difficult challenges; and indeed, at times, the government may be challenged by other groups that are not included in such alliances.

On the topic of whether ethnic federalism is conducive to the promotion of democracy or not, others also look at how its adoption could help alleviate many ethnic groups' grievances of lacking political representation that they aspire to enjoy in the process of democratization. Regina Goodnow and Robert Moser (2012) assess federalism's effect on the representation of

different groups in Russian politics and argue that the electoral system is more critical for the level of minority representation than the type of federal form of government that is in place. They further assess whether ethnic federalism could also increase the votes that a minority candidate receives, or if it even encourages minority turnout; and the authors find that majority-minority districts are more important than the forms of federal structures in place. Therefore, they contend that ethnic federalism does not necessarily translate into ethnic minorities gaining equal representation unless the electoral design is created in a way that empowers the minorities in the first place.

Sonia Alonso and Ruben Ruiz-Rufino (2007) and Assefa Fiseha (2012) also concur with the above argument in that the most direct way to make parliaments more accessible to ethnic minorities is to establish proportional electoral systems that can help groups maximize their chances of representation while also making coalition building a necessary feature of the country's politics. The pluralist first-past-the-post electoral mechanism in federal Ethiopia, according to them, therefore fails to provide such groups the voices they deserve, especially at the political centre.

Some authors' arguments also support the institution of ethnic federalism for the purposes of political representation as a foundation for democratic governance. Some argue that strong regional autonomy with empowered minorities is not only the ideal strategy to avoid ethnic conflicts but also very instrumental to achieving a measure of democracy by increasing group representation. In addition, ethnic federalism as a form of government in a multi-ethnic state and proportional representation as its electoral system offer a platform for equitable representation in state and federal governments (Van der Beken 2010; Huber 2012). Of course, reconciling such differences could be possible, although the major problem remains as to whether there is the political will to address such issues via genuine political reforms, which, among other things, could alter a pluralist electoral system. In the case of Ethiopia, as will be seen later in depth, this seems less promising.

In fact, the arguments above are not without contention, as some argue that ethnic federalism and/or proportional representation often exacerbate the problem of political representation. According to these scholars, the fact that ethnic federalism is how power is distributed could lead to highly ethnic-centred electoral campaigns that further create divisive politics – thereby posing ethnic polarization as a difficult challenge to national politics and efforts towards democracy. Hence, these authors challenge the above argument, in saying that political representation that reflects the demographic composition in electoral districts and constituencies in regional states is preferable to proportional representation (Ciepley 2013; Horowitz 2002).

In general, the discussions presented thus far show that there has been remarkable debate over the significance of the forms of federalism that are mainly constructed along ethnic and linguistic lines. As the chapters, especially in Part 2, attempt to explain how Ethiopia's model of ethnic federalism has played out since its inception in the early 1990s, despite the fact that ethnic

federalism could indeed help in answering demands for self-government by addressing the question of group rights in certain ways, we can see that it may also be costly when it comes to the issue of democratization efforts. And this is because ethnic federalism can lead to the reinforcement of clientelistic patterns of politics, on the one hand, and pave the way for the very elite who designed the institutional setting to survive and thrive within the political system by manipulating, manoeuvring, and initiating ethnic conflicts that could undermine the very benefits of the system they created to serve the diverse groups, on the other hand.

The most important takeaway, however, remains the fact that this institutional design of a federal structure can lead to the bolstering of the chances for authoritarian political survival, a perspective that is not picked up by many in comparative politics research on the topic thus far. Now that some of the debates on ethnic federalism, and its pros and cons with regard to a ranges of issues have been presented, it becomes essential to understand the role it also plays when it comes to state stability, and whether the Ethiopian political regime's political survival has primarily depended on this federal arrangement. And the question becomes: if so, how? Such a question will be further explored in the theory section, where the rationale that the political elite exploited for coming up with the design and implementation of this form of government is discussed more broadly.

In this regard, what government documents help describe, and how the realization of the ethnic federal arrangement might have impacted the survival of the political elite in practical terms, provide the theoretical foundations that explain how such an arrangement ensured the survival of the political elite. Before discussing the rationale of the elite, however, it is imperative to also look at instances of established federal states and how such states have entertained the issues of rights (political or economic and group- or individual-centred) in the institutional setting they created. Although this book focuses solely on the case of Ethiopia, citing cases across the spectrum could indeed broaden our understanding of the topic and how it plays out in practice. Thus, the next chapter attempts to address this aspect.

Efforts to understand the workings of most established federal states show that, besides fulfilling the desired objectives of the very reasons in newly constituting a given national government with a federal setting, the political elite have usually effectively managed to impose their political agenda along those very arrangements they shape. Such imposition of their political will can be attributed in a constructive way or in less constructive ways. What stands out, however, is that the literature in this regard needs to also evaluate how such political goals of the elite transpired in the decentralization schemes they devised regardless of whether the federal arrangement involves ethnicity and linguistic characteristics or not. Jan Erk's (2007) assessment of the Austrian case, for instance, shows that, despite the fact that that country's federal structure was devised to accommodate societal fragmentation within the country, the "pan-Austrian" nationalist agenda of the elite emerged as a uniting force

within the political spectrum, leading to further reinforcement of Austrian nationalism, to the satisfaction of the political elite and their desire to use the nationalist agenda as a way to affirm their legitimacy. Doing so, however, transformed the Austrian state from what the federal design had initially sought to accomplish, namely a high level of devolution of political powers to the federal states, to a situation in which, today, it is effectively more of a unitary centralist state than a federal one.² This example from Austria shows that federalism can also help with efforts to build political unity, as it was possible thanks to the political will from Austrian elites. In this instance, we see that, despite the change in how federalism played out in the country, the genuine interest of the political elite in keeping the question of Austrian nationalism alive, together with their democratic agenda, constituted a commendable effort in this case.

To reiterate the important argument above: although institutions matter in equal measure to the strategic interest of the elite, the latter's influence is much stronger. Even looking at federal cases such as Nigeria and India – and, to some extent, the government structure in South Africa, which has some attributes that look like federalism – whatever levels of political unity and relative political stability that are exhibited in those countries are made possible mainly through the will of the political elite, striving to amend historical problems through a new beginning and genuine political reforms.

As in the case of Austria, it is also important to look at cases such as India and how federal relations in that country work vis-à-vis other federal cases from a comparative perspective. Of course, doing so here will be challenging given the focus on Ethiopia. Nevertheless, taking into account the relative success of federal relations between the national government and the states in India (though, of course, huge challenges remain), investigating for detailed explanations becomes crucial. In this regard, we find that, in the case of India, the political elite at the national government understood that, if they were serious about transforming the national economy and improving the lives of ordinary Indians, it was important for the state governments to enjoy a level of independence in managing the needed economic reforms so that all member states of the federation would be able to identify their economic advantages to compete in the age of globalization. Such trust on the part of the national government was perhaps too relaxed, since it even allowed certain states some level of foreign relation powers in terms of advancing their own economic interests (Nirvikar & Srinivasan 2002). Whether in the case of Austria or India, however, one factor, becomes apparent: the genuine interest of the political elite at the national government level remains crucial.

Conclusion

In sum, ethnic federalism as an institutional choice is in fact a very contentious form of federal arrangement among the many types of federal systems that are debated in federalism studies. Nonetheless, what matters most in

whether a certain institutional design works better in addressing one issue or another largely depends on the intentions of the political elite who are behind its design in the first place – and, most importantly of all, on whether the elites that manipulate such institutions have genuine interests in the success of the very solutions they come up with to address both political and economic equality, democratization projects, and the creation of national unity within a stable and peaceful state, if that is possible.

Notes

- 1 Merera Gudina is a well-known opposition political who once served in parliament and is a professor of political science at Addis Ababa University. Although some of his essays, public lectures, and teachings (I too was taught by him) indicated that he thought the ethnic federal arrangement was badly designed, as a politician not only does he endorse this form of federal arrangement but his arguments are also becoming highly ethno-nationalistic, promoting the political and economic causes of the Oromos of Ethiopia.
- 2 Erk's assessment of the case of Austria shows that the political elite at the centre effectively used the media and the education system to push the nationalist agenda. This appears to be in clear contradiction with the Ethiopian case, where we find that nationalist programmes were censored and considered as part of the EPRDF's agenda against group rights. For more, see Erk (2007).

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5 The strategic elite and institutional designs in Ethiopia

The question of rights

Introduction

Apart from discussions of the political culture with regard to elite interaction and looking into the evolution of contemporary Ethiopian politics, this book also presents a study as to whether ethnic federalism as an institutional solution for lingering questions of political and economic inequality and conflicts has served the purposes it was designed to deliver. At the centre of efforts in constituting the Ethiopian state through ethnic federal arrangement was the debate on individual versus group rights. The EPRDF's political coalition, as it seized power in post-1991 Ethiopia, touted this form of federal arrangement as a way, it hoped, to correct the problems that it claimed were evident in Ethiopia's past.

Unfortunately, instead of creating the needed structural balance to promote both group and individual rights, the EPRDF elites preferred to protect group rights while downplaying the other and not giving it the attention that it deserved. Hence, what has evolved in practice since 1991 shows that the political elites prioritized political survival ahead of the promises they made as the institutional solutions designed to promote rights were modified to help the elite survival cause. Here, it is critical to examine why the post-1991 political regime seemed to have prioritized the issue of group rights over individual rights and how that enabled the political elite to manipulate the very federal arrangement they had established to protect and prioritize group rights.

For the sake of comparison, just look at the debates on individual versus group rights in the political history of the United States since that country's federal arrangement came into existence. When looking at the most vibrant history of the evolution of the American states as an instance, the ongoing debates on the issue of rights had temporarily culminated with the writing of the first ten amendments to the US constitution, which guaranteed civil liberties or individual rights to all (at least, to those who were referred as citizens in that period).¹ Some of the debates on the rights of groups on the basis of ethnicity, racial identification, socio-economic status, sexual orientation, and much more have either been solved recently, through court orders, and some are still being debated. These debates we see in the history of the United

States, or similar cases in the evolution of rights in other Western nations, also played the most important role in laying out the foundations for democratic discourse in those countries and beyond.² As a sub-Saharan state, Ethiopia is no different. As a country with over 80 ethnic groups, even after the secession of Eritrea, with more than ten other ethnic groups, the question of rights remains one that is still at the centre of its heated political debate.

With the fall of the Dergue regime in May 1991 and the coming to power of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic front, the Transitional Government of Ethiopia (TGE) was established. The TGE included many former rebel groups, the most notable ones being the Oromo Liberation Front and the Tigray People's Liberation Front. Although the TPLF became the most dominant party within the EPRDF, the OLF was just a partner to a political coalition, which throughout much of its existence acted much like a disciplined single party. One major aspect that most former rebel groups agreed upon, once the opportunity to form a government had come up, was to declare their intentions towards establishing democratic Ethiopia. To do so, for the elites within the EPRDF and OLF, meant expanding rights to those many groups that had demands, ranging from self-administration to the recognition of their grievances, such as under-representation, a lack of economic opportunity, and a history of domination by those ethnic groups that such groups perceived had controlled the political discourse in the previous regimes. As a result, many of the institutional mechanisms, from the introduction of ethnic federalism to the series of economic and social policies under the EPRDF coalition's rule, emerged as a way to address such grievances and advance equality on the basis of group rights.

The question becomes, instead, whether the emphasis given to group rights was able to advance the democratic rights of all groups in the country and if the EPRDF's intentions were really genuine from the start. And, if not, should we ask whether the propaganda on the promotion of group rights was just a ploy to advance a survivalist interest? Of course, the EPRDF's main efforts at political propaganda focused on informing the public just how much the EPRDF was focused on working to promote and protect every group's right to self-administration, representation in the central government, and their commitment to expand economic opportunities. By doing so, the EPRDF-led regime seems to have secured the level of political legitimacy it sought. As already stated, the post-1991 political regime in Ethiopia, with its plans of advancing the group rights agenda, primarily looked at the idea of constituting the Ethiopian state by introducing a new federal structure as a basis for power sharing and by extending the rights of groups to administer themselves.

Rights promotions in the service of political survival

It is vital to reiterate, however, how the idea of federalism accommodates the interests of diverse polities and explain how the current regime in

Ethiopia attempted to address the issue of rights within the federal structure it designed and implemented. Popular comparative politics scholars such as William Riker (1964), as well as a more recent work by Alfred Stepan (2005), all pointed to the service of constituting polities under federalism as a better solution for the emergence of stable democratic governance. After analysing the Rikerian models of federalism, however, Stepan, in particular, contends that, in looking at federal governments and the distribution of political power from the centre to the subunits, it is important to carefully understand how this institutional design affects the issue of individual rights vis-à-vis group rights. According to him, despite its limitations, the fact that US federalism has blossomed and become the world's strongest and most enduring federal arrangement is mainly attributed to the emphasis given to the protection of individual rights and minorities. Stepan asserts that the fact that representation in the upper house is "too constraining" of the populace's voice is what helped the protection of those same individual rights through the Bill of Rights (Stepan 2005: 260–263). According to Stepan,

Whatever rights the national subunits may possess, they cannot constitutionally or politically violate the rights of individual citizens. The enforcement of individual rights "in fact" can be an obligation of both the center and the subunits, but the center cannot completely delegate responsibility for the establishment and maintenance of democratic rights and continue to be a democracy.

(Stepan 2005: 263)

Here, it is important to note that certain institutional mechanisms that a certain polity adopts could play either a supporting or infringing role on the protection of either set of rights. The answer to the question of how that happens is, therefore, primarily embedded in the implementation of such institutional solutions and the evaluation of the results.

When it comes to looking at the case of Ethiopia under its new constitution, which was formally adopted in 1994, the government bestows extensive minority rights in the name of the expansion of group rights. Article 39, clause 1, of the constitution states: "Every Nation, Nationality and People in Ethiopia has an unconditional right to self-determination, including the right to secession."³ According to Kjetil Tronvoll (2008), such a statement (especially the addition of the phrase "including the right to secession") in the constitution was designed to serve as a "check on possible violations of such rights by the central government". This notion of granting another right in the form of "secession", in addition to the fact that such ethnic groups have now "achieved" some level of independence in self-governance, is controversial, however.

Moreover, the fact that there is also a clause in the constitution about the ability to check the federal government's powers does not mean that an authoritarian central state might not still attempt to violate either the autonomy of

states or individual rights. Tronvoll further argues that, “regardless of constitutional protection of collective group rights, the Ethiopian government is still being criticized for massive and widespread human rights abuses” (Tronvoll 2008: 50). This indeed begs a further question, while it is important to note that the Ethiopian government seems to adopt such rights issues as its own core values so that it can enjoy legitimacy in the eyes of domestic interests as well as the international community at some level, and its interest in ensuring control of the state for a prolonged time could very well be the case. Nonetheless, the displacement of individuals from areas controlled by “other” ethnic groups – in ethnically constituted regional states – that they might not identify with has resulted in unprecedented levels of ethnic violence in the country.

Certainly, there is credible evidence that points to what this work refers to as the elite’s manipulation of institutions. Lovise Aalen and Kjetil Tronvoll’s (2009) article, for instance, points to the fact that the ruling EPRDF coalition amassed an unprecedented amount of methods to skew public opinion in its favour and clear the road for electoral fraud as it sought to make sure its political dominance remained stable. The authors mention that the ruling EPRDF coalition effectively used aid money and international aid packages and its distribution mechanisms via government institutions to achieve these political aims. The puzzling question over the survival of a minority-supported political regime (Tigrayans, only about 6 per cent of the total population of the country, overwhelmingly support the EPRDF) in the country, therefore, can very likely be linked to the ruling coalition’s manipulation of the institutional mechanisms that it created for its survival strategies, even though the solutions it introduced had targeted the notion of promotion of group rights. Aalen and Tronvoll, in explaining the clampdown on protests and election fraud in the post-2005 elections, for instance, state:

During field visits to Southern region, people in both rural and urban areas consistently confirmed that the *sub-kebele* [Ethiopian lower-level local government] structures had been established during the year of the 2005 elections. In interviews with party officials at regional and local level in Southern region in May 2005, it was apparent that they had been established by an initiative from the upper party structures. The official aim was “to make service delivery at local level more efficient and to mobilize people for development work”. In areas where the population relies on relief, these local governments were responsible for distributing aid through the UNDP and World Bank-funded “safety net” programs, which in some areas included the distribution of funds to purchase fertilizer, seeds or oxen, while in other areas it was payment in cash for community work or food for work. Although the ruling party presented these structures as purely public administrative organs, it is apparent that the *sub-kebele* was used for election purposes in an attempt to secure its victory.

(Aalen & Tronvoll 2009: 198–199)

Undeniably, as the authors contend above, the federal setting in Ethiopia has failed to empower groups across different levels of government, as the regime exploited such an arrangement for successfully enacting electoral fraud, among other things. When the Transitional Government of Ethiopia (1991–1995) was set up after the fall of the Dergue regime, the elites in charge of this transition indeed made their democratic intentions clear from the start.⁴ Unfortunately, the events as they proceeded, starting with the introduction of ethnic federalism and a series of economic and political policies that followed, indicate that such efforts, which were used to address historic group grievances, ended up serving the interests of the new ruling elite themselves. They were crafted as tactics of the Tigrayan political elites to stay in power and safeguard their effective control of the state, as well as their dominance of the ruling EPRDF coalition, for many decades to come, until the regime came to an abrupt halt in early 2018.

In the name of the ruling party's plans to use institutional mechanisms to protect group rights, important role players in the ruling political coalition have indeed enjoyed greater political powers, reaching beyond the confines of those enumerated in the constitution of the Ethiopian state. Moreover, the economic development plans and series of economic policies, which were designed to empower different groups in the country and supposed to help create and promote economic equality, also failed, mainly because the institutional structures that should have served as foundations for the distribution of wealth and economic opportunities have also served the interests of those same political elites and their supporters. Here, the invoking of the role of the political elite's rational interests is very important, in that the fact that the institutional mechanisms failed to deliver reinforcements for democratic progress is attributed to the elites' reluctance to keep the promises they made to focus on democratic governance. As we will see later, however, such intentions did not accomplish any of these plans.

Here, it is vital to note that those political elites in the Ethiopian state who designed the new institutions and oversaw the implementation of policies had, in large part, emerged from the former rebel groups that formed the EPRDF coalition, a coalition that would be dominated by the TPLF as the transition unfolded. The long-time chairman of the TPLF and the ruling coalition EPRDF, Meles Zenawi, who first served as the president of the Transitional Government of Ethiopia from 1991 to 1995 and then continued to serve as prime minister until his sudden death in 2012, was considered the architect of the new Ethiopia under this federal setting. Zenawi's comrades in the armed struggle (within the TPLF), with the gradual addition of loyalist leaders of EPRDF-affiliated political parties, such as the Amhara National Democratic Movement (which later became the Amhara Democratic Party [ADP], until it joined the new national Prosperity Party in 2019), the Oromo People's Democratic Organization (OPDO, which later became the Oromo Democratic Party [ODP], until it too joined the PP), and the Southern Ethiopian People's Democratic Movement (SEPDM, which later also joined the PP), continued

to hold government positions for extended period of time. With the exception of the TPLF, however, the political elites representing the other three parties of the coalition were highly co-opted and lacked the political power to assert their interests. Even the “retirement” of some of the elites who had held important political positions, to pave the road for what the Ethiopian regime claimed would be the emergence of a new generation of leaders, was fruitless in the end, as some of those retired elites continued to serve as ambassadors in very important diplomatic missions and in “advisory” and mentorship roles to the new individuals in the political landscape of the state.⁵ Unfortunately, this situation of formerly corrupt leaders serving as diplomats and advisors is still common even after the advent of the political change in 2018.

After all, these political parties, and the historical background to the emergence of these parties, themselves warrant further research. Regardless of this, however, besides the rolling out of ethnic federalism as an institutional mechanism guiding centre–regional state relations, the economic plans and ideological dogmas that the EPRDF-led coalition government adopted also plainly rejected the neoliberal school of thought for economic development and growth by opting to use economic paradigms advocating or calling for heavy state involvement in the economy, which effectively created a further opening for the political elite to use their heavy-handed approach in the development agenda.

The first series of economic development and growth strategies that emerged after 1991 were shaped after the new political and economic development paradigm that the elites referred to as “revolutionary democracy”. This view, as can be seen from the governing documents of the EPRDF coalition, prioritized group rights over individual rights. The fact that the coalition carried such a goal when it came to ensuring the political representation as well as the autonomy of groups within their administrative regions might not sound threatening on its own. Beyond putting group rights over individual rights, however, it becomes clear that proponents of such a view within the regime are firmly opposed to the protection of individual rights altogether, as we will see more in later chapters. This is because doing so could create political challenges for groups that are in charge of their own administrative regions, as laws that promote individual rights could force the regional elites to also care for individuals other than members of the group that “owns” any given regional state.

For example, in a document published by the Amhara National Democratic Movement (later the ADP, and which was a member of the EPRDF coalition), the coalition’s development manifesto clearly claims the communist agenda of anti-wealth accumulation as its own and argues that individuals’ efforts at economic growth mostly come at the expense of groups and minorities that the ruling coalition refers to as the “unfortunate classes”.⁶ For the ruling coalition in Ethiopia, to make sure that group rights were protected even if that came with the cost of negatively impacting individual rights, the issue of property rights (with land rights being the most important one) became the

focal point. Under such a plan, adopted by the central government, the issue of land rights and the fate of peasants relying purely on the value of their land holdings would fall into the hands of the highly interventionist party dominating the state. Eventually, the failures of the “revolutionary democracy” paradigm and its damaging legacy for the democratic as well as economic development of the country, became clear, which then paved the way for the survival of the authoritarian elite.

Manipulation of institutional frameworks by the EPRDF

When looking at the regime’s track record on how it manipulates the institutional frameworks and economic policies it designs for its goals of survival, among the major instances, what happened after the major split within the TPLF leadership in 2001 serves as a prime example. In the aftermath of the famous intra-party conflict that had shaken the government following the brutal war against Eritrea, the late prime minister, Meles Zenawi, produced new writings on the topic of revolutionary democracy as an economic and political paradigm for the EPRDF coalition’s council members. They readily signed off on these new plans by the premier, who had also served as the main political and economic ideologue of the party. The coalition immediately implemented the plan, and decided that property (mainly land) would be used to support supporters and punish those who were perceived as opposition and would-be opposition supporters (especially those who were suspected to be backers of the former regime or antagonists to their rule). The regime also used land and property policies to punish former civil servants, instead of the protection of group rights as the regime had at first claimed. Such policies showed that the institutional mechanisms that were put in place were designed to eventually serve the interests of the elite, who effectively manipulate and use the system to create winners and losers and prolong their political rule through their control of the state and its institutions, on many fronts.

In 2008 the regime replaced revolutionary democracy with another interventionist state economic development and growth paradigm, known as the developmental state economic model.⁷ According to Befekadu Wolde-Gabriel (2013), the idea of adopting the developmental state economic development and growth approach in Ethiopia was again initiated by none other than Zenawi, who single-handedly led the country until his death in 2012. In an unpublished paper that Zenawi presented at conferences, he discussed the failure of neoliberal economic paradigm to transforming not only Ethiopia’s but Africa’s economy and how the liberals in the West failed to support continuing economic growth in ways that could have benefited Africans. Wolde-Gabriel states that Zenawi argued that

the fundamental nature of the neo-liberal paradigm has thus led Africa into another economic dead end and into a fragile unstable democracy that is not only incapable of evolving into a stable and mature democracy

but actually hinders the development of an alternative path of democracy that leads overtime to such a mature and stable democracy.⁸

(Wolde-Gabriel 2013: 3)

The political coalition in Ethiopia also enacted such reforms not only on the basis of economic development strategies for the country alone but, primarily, to ensure that it continued the promotion of group rights in terms of expanding opportunities that it had previously attempted through the implementation of the strategies derived from the revolutionary democratic economic and political programmes. Nevertheless, the question remains at heart: what role did such political solutions of ensuring various groups' questions of representation as well as economic opportunities play in strengthening the political reign of the governing coalition in power?⁹ From the economic programmes attempted in the last two decades, we can see that the institutions designed to facilitate such programmes of economic development and empowerment of what the elites perceived as "historically underprivileged" ethnic groups merely served as platforms that helped elite manipulation for the political goal of staying in power. The fact that the ethnic model of federalism had permitted the most important powers to remain within the federal government (because of the coalition's firm control of the centre) also shows that the ruling coalition and its disciplined and well-crafted party organization was able to repeatedly embark on the implementation of such programmes with the goal of achieving political survival.

In general, in any of these economic reform programmes (such as the revolutionary democracy economic political paradigm, or the developmental state approach), the state has magnified its superiority in charting considerable rates of economic progress, which are recognizable across some levels.¹⁰ Moreover, the fact that the state had a goal of promoting group rights was not a problem in its own. As explained thus far, however, the way the government addressed the question of political as well as economic equality mostly reflected the interests of the political party and its affiliates in political power, which might have contributed to the regime's effective control of the state and how it ensured political survival amid the many challenges the dominant coalition party faced. Sadly, displacements of minorities from most of the regions, identity-based violence, and ethnic conflicts were also a continuing feature of the country's politics, primarily because of the lack of emphasis given to individual rights protection, which any federal arrangement should have enabled. Thus, whatever levels of success were registered came at the expense of individual rights, which meant that, in the world of the EPRDF, which ruled the state until 2019, one could win as a group, but lose as an individual. The political elites, with their rational strategies of manipulating the institutions they devised, were therefore able to hold on to political power by effectively controlling the state and ensuring stability in most of their political reign.

Conclusion

The theoretical explanation presented thus far shows that, although the debate centring on individual rights versus group rights was a healthy part of the discussions in the political discourse of the state, the fact that the “winning idea” of the promotion of group rights was exploited to create winners and losers, to reward regime loyalists and supporters, and punish those perceived as opponents and critics, as evident in the discussions that follow this chapter, still show that the elites’ manipulation of the very institutional solutions they had set up was all about effectively securing political survival. Before moving on to assessing the ethnically arranged federal Ethiopia and the mechanisms of authoritarian survival in the contemporary history of the country, in the next two chapters the focus is on helping us understand the historical evolution of the modern Ethiopian state, the missed opportunities by varying political regimes, and the political elite at the helm of political power within those regimes.

Notes

- 1 The US constitution, in its original form, mostly discusses the powers given to the three branches of government and issues related to constitutional amendments. The issues of civil rights and civil liberties were mostly covered in the first ten amendments (the Bill of Rights), and 21 others were made after that. See www.senate.gov/civics/constitution_item/constitution.htm.
- 2 Reynolds Bradford notes that, although both individual and group rights can be complimentary, in the evolution of rights in the United States, however, they could be used to also infringe upon each other’s rights. For more, see Reynolds (1984).
- 3 Look at page 13 of the constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia.
- 4 Look at the transitional charter of the government, published in 1991.
- 5 Seyoum Mesfin, a former rebel from the TPLF and a long-serving foreign minister, retired from his post in 2011, only to become Ethiopian ambassador in China and stay in this position until 2018. Girma Biru, who had served for almost two decades in various important Cabinet positions, also retired, but became the country’s ambassador to the United States, Canada, and Jamaica on the completion of his ministerial duties. Many more examples could be mentioned.
- 6 The revolutionary democracy document and the statement mentioned here can be accessed at www.aigaforum.com/documents/Abyotawi-Democracy-Hidar-Magazine.pdf.
- 7 Part of the material here on the emergence of the developmental state approach in Ethiopia and its initial implementation is taken from a short unpublished article I wrote in 2014.
- 8 I would like to point out that the writer as well as the website Aiga Forum are regime-affiliated.
- 9 Here, I am not arguing that such reforms brought economic opportunities for all groups, but just attempting to show the regimes’ declared aspirations.

- 10 The developmental state model in Ethiopia has achieved considerable economic success. The institutions needed for such economic gains were not as strong as they could have been, however. For more, see Dejene and Cochrane (2019).

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Part 2

Ethnic federalism, an authoritarian coalition, and political change in Ethiopia



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6 Ethiopia's ethnic federalism

Structural frameworks as mechanisms for authoritarian survival

Background

So far, in Part 1 of the book, I have explained that the first constitution of the Ethiopian state, in 1931, as well as the revised constitution of 1954, concentrated much of the political power on a sovereign emperor. As a consequence, it was clear that such constitutional moves failed to provide the necessary platform for the evolution of the democratic rights of the diverse groups in the country, in that a constitutionally limited monarchy of the type that many other countries had successfully embarked upon did not materialize. For instance, for the emperor and the political elite who orchestrated such constitutional frameworks, recognizing the rights of diverse groups was considered a move that could endanger pan-Ethiopian political ideology and pave the way for the emergence of forces that could imperil the unity of the state. What then transpired, unfortunately, was that the failure to recognize popular demands for freedom and, most importantly, to acknowledge political and economic inequality did not prevent the emergence of various rebel forces, which would take the country into the uncharted territories of a civil war that went on to claim many lives, displaced millions, and kept the people at large in poverty and targets of recurrent famine. It is also vital to note that these past political and economic inequalities did not benefit a particular group but the then political elites themselves.

After the 1974 revolution, the Dergue and its military leaders, following a lengthy delay, also introduced a new constitution, in 1987. The problem with this constitutional effort, however, was that, despite putting the “working” citizens at the centre of political power, it failed to systematically address the grievances of the many armed rebel groups that claimed to carry their respective groups’ grievances in legitimizing their struggle. The 1987 constitution’s preamble, for instance, explains:

We, the working people of Ethiopia, based on a centuries-old glorious history, are engaged in a great revolutionary struggle ourselves from our current state of backwardness, and to transform Ethiopia into a socialist society with high level of development where justice, equality and social prosperity prevail.¹

The regime's open identification of itself as a socialist government and its sole focus on the "workers" as the most important segment of the citizenry was no surprise, given similarities across most socialist regimes. Throughout its 17-year rule, however, it failed to address or properly negotiate the overarching reasons for the disheartening civil war that was weakening the state and claiming the lives of its citizens. Moreover, although the country's glorious past cannot be denied, the fact that those who opposed the regime and raised arms could not fathom that past in and of itself has sustained the challenges the state faced. Although the Dergue's 1987 constitution differed greatly from both the 1931 and 1954 constitutions, and it mostly focused on preaching the unity of the state and included several mentions of the country's glorious past, even recent political elites (from the now defunct EPRDF) and political organizations still differ in their opinions of it. Consequently, the regime's military leaders' rigid focus on the idea of staying in power, invoking the unity of the state and the sole goal of preserving that unity at all costs, ultimately contributed to their downfall.

After the emergence of the TPLF-led EPRDF coalition as a new political force in the country, after which the formation of the coalition was formalized in what is popularly known as the "London Conference" of 1991, and with the addition of the Oromo Liberation Front and the Eritrean People's Liberation Front as part of the old rebel consortium that took over the political proceedings of the Ethiopian state from the Dergue, Ethiopia then entered into a new political transition in May 1991 (Gudina 2011). This consortium of now former rebel groups reached consensus over Eritreans' right to determine their own future, paving the way for secession from Ethiopia. With the US government and its envoy, the assistant secretary of state for African affairs, Herman Cohen, as negotiators and then eventual advisors to these ex-rebels, the group decided that Ethiopia's future would be democratic and shared their commitment for the formation of a transitional government that the EPRDF coalition would be in charge of. The Eritreans started the processes of formally seceding from Ethiopia, and the OLF, a political force that claimed to represent the Oromo of Ethiopia, would also become part of the transitional government. The transitional government then wasted no time before it published the Transitional Charter of the state, which went on to serve as a quasi-constitutional document guiding the transition until the new constitution was finally ratified in 1995.

The post-1991 Transitional Charter

The Transitional Charter in 1991 laid out the most necessary ingredients for the publication of the federal constitutional framework for the country, which was ratified in 1995. In many ways, the charter was a departure from the age-old constitutions and rulebooks of the state in how it attempted to project the newly minted elites' "democratic" intentions. The preamble of the new Transitional Charter, however, starts not by discussing the dawn of a new

hope for the people but by bashing the Dergue. The first sentence starts by stating:

Whereas the overthrow of the military dictatorship that has ruled Ethiopia for seventeen years presents a historical moment, providing the Peoples of Ethiopia with the opportunity to rebuild the country and restructure the state democratically ...²

It then references what it presumes the Ethiopian people lacked under the leadership of the previous regimes, and makes a new assertion for the need to establish a federal state whereby the self-administrative rights of all peoples in the country are respected and guaranteed. In doing so, it states:

Whereas peace and stability, as essential conditions of development, require the end of all hostilities, the healing of wounds caused by conflicts and the establishment and maintenance of good neighborliness and cooperation ...

Keep in mind that the previous regimes had all been indoctrinating the populace about the need to strengthen Ethiopian unity and their nationalist agendas; as clearly stated above, the charter attempts to provide a framework for addressing the need for self-administration and tackling the lingering political and economic inequality. The charter thus considered the diverse groups in the country as “neighbours”, now coming together for the first time to constitute the Ethiopian state afresh, and effectively laid out the groundwork for the materialization of ethnic federalism as an institutional and constitutional solution for the country’s problems.

Moreover, although the fact that the charter invoked the idea of self-determination with regard to the promotion of group rights, the fact that such a concept was historically used by most formerly colonized states seeking such rights to determine their future resulted in new confusion among scholars observing the transition closely. Thus, some of the literature seemed to come to an agreement, that the concept of “self-determination” in fact has an “internal dimension” to it as well. In this regard, Aaron Micheau states:

While self-determination has generally been recognized as affording a right to independence from traditional colonization, recent writers have argued that the principle has an “internal aspect” that provides for democratic rights and social and cultural expression. This form of internal self-determination, if applied and observed, may preempt and prevent secession and/or civil war, and protect human rights. In some societies, application of internal self-determination may also require juridical recognition of ethnic or national groups. Such recognition is at odds with traditional human rights discourse. It also challenges a more conservative view that nationalism is “invented” by political leaders and is not a

reaction to ethnic or cultural repression. The existence of hierarchical, culturally unintegrated societies requires a new approach to human rights discourse and the self-determination principle.³

(Micheau 1996: 367–368)

Obviously, the struggle for independence that many armed movements in sub-Saharan Africa waged against colonial forces was mainly for similar goals of achieving self-determination rights (pushing for independence) to the people that they represented and struggled for. Regardless, the point becomes whether the charter, with its explanation of the democratic rights it bestows on all peoples of Ethiopia, indeed provided the important credence for individual and group rights alike. Given that individuals cannot in conceptual or logical terms protect their self-determination rights without credible commitment coming from those with political authority, yet again, the question becomes whether such rights attributed to groups negatively impact the individual rights. As discussed in earlier chapters, the answer then becomes: it did. That, of course, is in addition to questioning whether institutions that are important in protecting these individuals and minorities in a new federal setting are even available – and, if they are available, whether such institutions are permitted to function with independence from an incumbent coalition's interference also becomes a fresh challenge.

Despite the fears, in terms of the prospect of the document mentioning such a right leading other groups to also vie for secession by following in the footsteps of the Eritrean People's Liberation Front's withdrawal of Eritrea from the Ethiopian state, the political elites in later interviews have clarified that the notion of self-determination had to be included as a guarantee for each ethnic group's political elites' understanding that Ethiopian identity is not imposed on them. Rather, being an "Ethiopian" becomes a national identity that they preferred to accept as a way to perfect the union that they were forming during that particular period.⁴ Part one of the charter in fact has accomplished this, although it remains controversial. Part two of the document also mentions the rights of individuals first and then goes on to group rights. In its article 1, such rights are explained as follows:

Based on the universal declaration of human rights of the United Nations, adopted by the assembly ... Particularly, every individual shall have, a) the freedom of conscience, expression, association and peaceable assembly; and b) the right to engage in unrestricted political activity and to organize political parties, provided the exercise of such right does not infringe the rights of others.⁵

And article 2 of the charter mentions group rights thus:

The rights of nations, nationalities and peoples to self-determination is affirmed. To this end, each nations, nationality and people is guaranteed

the right to: a) preserve its identity and have it respected, promote culture and history and use and develop its language; b) administer its own affairs within its own defined territory and effectively participate in the central government on the basis of freedom, and fair and proper representation; c) exercise its rights to self-determination of independence, when the concerned, nation/nationality and people is convinced that the above rights are denied, abridged or abrogated.⁶

As can be seen from these quotes from the charter, both individual and group rights were protected, and the democratic nature of the document was somewhat on display. Nevertheless, as mentioned by a former official who at that time was a member of the OLF leadership and an active member of the group of scholars who took part in the drafting of the charter, one of its most important aspects that was debated behind the curtain, as they “were working towards laying out the foundations for the constitution that will later replace the Transitional Charter”, was the issue of individuals’ property rights.⁷ In an interview, the individual stated that the fact that the nature and identity of the individual leaders presiding over the writing of the charter came from the rebel groups that had gone through the armed struggle made it conducive to ignoring individuals’ property rights altogether. According to the interviewee, leaders, especially from the TPLF, were unyielding, in that most within their leadership argued that the constitution would later explain everyone’s rights explicitly and the fact that they were trying to address the issue then was designed to appease to what they referred to as “the Amhara chauvinists”, who were considered to have control of a disproportionate level of wealth across the nation. Sadly, this interview with a person who had participated in such debates clarified that Tigrayan ethno-nationalists (from the TPLF) had an imagined enemy, and that happened to be the group of Amhara elites they considered to be an enemy of the “oppressed minorities” in successive regimes in the past. What is surprising is that the issue of property rights was addressed later in the constitution, though it was done such that there were few details with respect to the individual’s right to the ownership of properties in the newly introduced federal setting, at least to the level of expectations of many people.

Nevertheless, two important accomplishments of the transitional charter remain critical. First, the fact that the charter laid the foundations for a federal constitution was hugely important. Second, so was the declaration of the transitional era’s political elites’ intent towards democratic development, which was taken at face value. But the question became the practicality of any of such promises.

Initial democratic setbacks: emergence of survivalist and fractured political elites

The post-1991 political transition, although it raised democratic hopes and seemed promising at first, was full of critical setbacks that took the country

back to the political uncertainties of old. As a former official argued, from the beginning it became clear that the leaders within the TPLF who orchestrated the formation of the EPRDF coalition of four parties retained the most important powers within the military. Furthermore, the rapidly growing intelligence forces loyal to the TPLF immediately started to play important roles in supporting the ruling coalition's political agenda, which even expanded to controlling the political state of affairs in transitional Ethiopia, occurring mostly in the name of restoring stability. The interviewee stated that,

for the OLF leadership that participated in the transitional process and had occupied certain ministerial Cabinets in the transitional government, patience would become so important as TPLF's power started to grow and everyone within the transition became aware of the fact that questioning such dominance and asking the TPLF leaders for respect towards other regional parties' independence in administrative duties became unquestionable and dangerous.⁸

After the departure of the EPLF with Eritrea's independence, the only parties that participated in the transition and had considerable number of soldiers and armaments that were holdovers from the military struggle against the central government were the TPLF, the OLF, and the EPDM (which later became the ANDM, and then the ADP, until it joined the current ruling Prosperity Party in 2018). Both the TPLF and the EPDM had already joined the EPRDF coalition by then, and thus merged their soldiers in an apparent move to replace the Dergue-era Ethiopian army in an unceremonious manner.⁹ The problem within the partnership of such former rebel forces first occurred, however, when the TPLF-led EPRDF coalition persuaded the OLF leaders to also disarm their soldiers, given that the country was now undertaking a new and democratic transition, and so having a strong and united national army was important more than ever. After the OLF was obliged to do so and disarmed its military, the TPLF had ensured not only that the political transition had been completed in its favour but also that, if any failures within the transition were to occur, the OLF's sizable army was in no position to pose any challenge whatsoever.

Eventually, within a short period of time, the OLF leadership decided to leave its partnership with the TPLF-led EPRDF coalition. The decision was made because staying in the transitional government, according to its leaders, had become unbearable, as the TPLF's dominating role was too much – even to the extent of interfering in the daily and routine decisions by the OLF leadership. Thus, the OLF and its political movement, despite its substantial support, reflecting the population size of the Oromo of Ethiopia who they represented, would be declared a new enemy for the Ethiopian state led by the EPRDF coalition government, immediately after its exit from the transitional government.

Dima Noggo Sarbo (2009), one of the former leaders of the OLF, who also served as a Cabinet minister in the Transitional Government of Ethiopia until the OLF's departure shortly after the transition, explains the entire process thus:

The transitional government, however, collapsed in less than a year, the TPLF declaring war on its erstwhile partner, the OLF and the latter leaving the TGE (Transitional Government of Ethiopia). The TPLF, however, continued to rule in the name of the transitional government for another three years. The regime also requested the United Nations to facilitate the independence of Eritrea, the first such case, and in 1993 Eritrea formally declared independence and joined the United Nations, making Ethiopia a landlocked state. The TPLF regime was the first to recognize the new state (of Eritrea). In 1994 a Constituent Assembly, made up of TPLF and its surrogates, was elected, which approved a constitution that, in theory, set up a federal government of nine regional states, five of them dominated by the principal national groups, and the rest multinational regions ... A general election was conducted in 1995, contested by the TPLF without any challenger, and power was transferred from the TGE to the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE). In practice, however, power remained centralized under the dominant party and the coercive apparatus of the state, the army and security services, loyal only to the core leadership of the ruling party.¹⁰

The above quote is important to the argument here, but more context is needed. Sarbo's point is, in part, to show how the TPLF was behind the successful and seamless process that ultimately achieved Eritrean state independence from Ethiopia, which brought the EPLF (which remains the new country's incumbent as the PFDJ) leaders' dream to fruition. The second point that Sarbo invokes is to show that the transitional political era process was quite dominated by the TPLF, which contributed to the OLF's withdrawal from its governing duties as a partner in the ruling coalition.

The departure of the OLF from its administrative role in Ethiopia's transitional government and the subsequent decision by the TPLF-led EPRDF coalition to wage war against the newly departed "foes" thus constitutes the first, and most important, setback to democratic development in post-1991 Ethiopia. The fracturing of the transition government, with the OLF long gone, also intensified many groups' and elites' already rampant suspicions that the EPRDF's "declared" intentions for democratic Ethiopia were nothing but a TPLF conspiracy to ensure its dominance and survival. Certainly, as the complaints from the former OLF elites imply, the TPLF emerged dominant by asserting itself as the strongest political party within the EPRDF coalition.

Democratic opening curtailed: crackdown on civil society followed

One positive development that came out of the country's transitional period was the emergence of what appeared to be a stronger civil society, especially a wide-ranging free press, which had not been seen in any period in pre-1991 Ethiopia. Then the TPLF-dominated transitional government published its first press proclamation in 1992, under which the authorities started to directly attack and detain journalists and shut down the doors of the once promising free-press publishing houses. This, as we can see further in the discussion below, made the democratic opening short-lived and disappointing. A former reporter, who was one of the first five independent journalists to be ever charged under the 1992 press proclamation, told me that

the amount of freedom journalists had enjoyed in the initial period of the transitional government was beyond words. That level of unrestricted freedom in journalism, however, started to dwindle downwards immediately after the press proclamation of 1992 became officially published in *Negarit Gazeta* [the Ethiopian parliament's publication for newly passed legislation]. At the time I was reporting the continued harassment of Amhara citizens across Oromia and Ethiopian/Somali regional states, and the government considered my reporting as inciting violence against the brotherly peoples within the federal state. In my reporting, I explained that the then Transitional Charter that laid out the country's federal structure before it became official in the 1995 constitution was problematic in how it was impacting individuals' rights and greater freedom of Ethiopian minorities. Especially, those who live and work in regional states that are dominated by certain ethnic groups that such individuals do not identify with were the ones that suffered the most, and that was what I thoroughly indicated in my reporting.¹¹

The former journalist, who now lives in exile in the United States, further asserted that,

among some of my colleagues in the free press, one who extensively wrote about the killing of an Addis Ababa University student, who was murdered by intelligence service members of the regime in the summer of 1992, was forcefully asked to write false reports about the murdered student. The intelligence officers demanded that he described the student as a sympathizer of the Dergue's military regime and a former member of the Worker's Party of Ethiopia, which was the only legitimate political party in the Dergue era. When he refused to do so, they kept him in a police station, abused and tortured him until he fainted. He was later released, but only after he suffered so much pain and eventually left his profession in journalism, given the agony he experienced was too much to bear.

Moreover, the government's use of the said proclamation to silence its critics, and its efforts in subjecting them to high levels of abuse and torture, is also well documented. Amnesty International's report mentions the use of this proclamation by the regime by stating,

The EPRDF government has used legislation to stifle dissent since the early days after it came into power. More than 200 independent publications, including over 60 newspapers, were registered by the then Ministry of Information under the 1992 Press Law, which criminalized defamation, and established a number of other crimes, for instance the "instigation of one nationality against another". These crimes attracted stiff penalties and up to three years' imprisonment. By 1998, the application of the press law had significantly reduced the number of independent media publications in Ethiopia to less than 20.

(Amnesty International 2016: 1)

The assault on civil society in general and the free press in particular at the start of the post-1991 transition was, therefore, plain for everyone to see. But what eventually happened after many years was that a new press proclamation was published. Under the newly legislated proclamation, the EPRDF continued to charge journalists and their work that criticized its rule; and most reporters would be charged with treason and terrorism-related accusations. The press proclamation of 1992 in general, however, was also the worst news for those who had hoped that the "declared" democratic opening at the start of the Transitional Charter and the alternative sources of information that had been growing during that period would continue to expand and help the democratic consolidation efforts. Tracy Ross explains the overarching assault directed at the free press:

While nations across the world have come to respect and honor freedom of expression and access to information as inalienable human rights, the government of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia has spent years retreating from the international norm on media rights. The Ethiopian Constitution lays out the legal rights of citizens to hold opinions, thoughts, and free expressions. In the past, the government used a 1992 press proclamation as a means of restricting those rights of private media and, consequently, the citizens of Ethiopia.

(Ross 2010: 1048)

Until 2018, the year the TPLF's dominance of the EPRDF ended, the free press continued to deteriorate, and stayed bad. Until the coming of Abiy Ahmed as the new premier that year, therefore, the free press in Ethiopia was no more, and the only publications circulating, mainly in the capital, were entertainment newspapers and magazines – and, of course, the newspapers owned by TPLF supporters, which either simply promoted the government,

its political elite, and the TPLF/EPRDF policy agendas or kept quiet about reporting many of the political challenges and debates across the populace. (At the end of Part 2, more recent developments are examined in more detail, as what has been presented so far is just the initial setbacks.)

What is highly significant in post-1991 Ethiopia (both during the transitional period and beyond the constitution's ratification in 1995) is that the free press was even under siege in areas other than the capital, Addis Ababa, as the circulation of the free press's newspapers in regional states was hampered by the continuing control of such distributions by the intelligence services of the regional states. These agencies, which received direct orders from the central command of the EPRDF, from its headquarters in Addis Ababa, were of course loyal and uncompromising in implementing such anti-press newspaper circulation policies, even if few such publications actually existed.

A former bureaucrat who worked for the EPRDF regime in both Amhara and Tigray regional states said that, when it came to press freedom throughout the regional states he served in for over a decade, given that most regional states are out of the sight of foreign diplomats, international aid agencies, and – most importantly – the international media, there was no tolerance extended to those who attempted to write about governance issues, citizen complaints, or even columns focusing on those regional states, and they were harassed and usually faced very stiff punishment from the authorities.¹² The regional states and their officials acted similarly to the TPLF-controlled authorities in Addis Ababa.

What is noteworthy about this individual's account, however, is the story he shared with me about how the Tigray regional state controlled the flow of newspapers into the Tigrayan state in particular. According to him,

The TPLF, who controls the EPRDF's coalition and also administers the Tigray regional state, knows full well that, if the newspapers from the free press were to be freely circulated in the region, the Tigrayan population would be presented with information that explains how much the rest of the country was complaining about the TPLF's dominance of the country and the criticism of their dominance and thus governance. As a result, throughout my service in the region, I have never seen any copy of newspapers from what was considered to be the free press in Addis Ababa reaching the streets of Mekele or Axum [cities in the regional state of Tigray]. If you are lucky to read some, it must be a friend or a relative who came from Addis Ababa or other cities that must have brought them to you.

What is described thus far shows that the Transitional Charter, which had seemed promising in its democratic intent (despite its flaws), failed in practice, as a result of the growing dominance of the TPLF, which manifested itself in the marginalization of the Amhara public, the ousting of the OLF from the transitional government, and its assault on the then promising civil society.

Hence, the assault directed against the free press eventually led to the end of the democratic opening and laid the foundations for the formal establishment of a dominant-party state. Next, it is crucial to look at the federal constitution ratified in 1995 and the emergence of the TPLF-dominated EPRDF as an authoritarian party that put its survivalist agenda above and beyond the age-old popular demands for freedom, political, and economic equality, and how that evolved in Ethiopia's newly introduced federal setting.

The 1995 federal constitution and the emergence of a dominant-party state

Understanding the rationale behind the OLF's exit from the transitional government, which resulted in the TPLF/EPRDF's emergence as the sole dominant party, the marginalization of the Amhara elites and intellectuals, and the crackdown on civil society, ensuring that most critics and potential ones were now silenced, enables us to move on and look at the 1995 constitution. It is now clear that the transitional period had not even ended before the authoritarian character of the incumbent coalition's political elites emerged. Shortly before the constitution was written and formalized by the Constitutional Assembly – whose proceedings and agenda were mainly dominated by the EPRDF coalition – it became clear that anyone seeking to challenge the EPRDF could no longer do so. And, given that the newly formed opposition political parties lacked the necessary level playing field to compete against the growing power of the TPLF-led EPRDF political elite, the EPRDF coalition's intention to create a single-party-dominated state became clearer than ever before.

Although the EPRDF (until its dissolution in 2019) was a coalition of political parties, the fact that it operated as one party and all four member parties followed strict party discipline mean that the desire to create a one-party state would be plain sailing. Terrence Lyons, a scholar who closely observed the growing power of the EPRDF coalition despite its domination by one of its members, the TPLF, states:

The EPRDF led throughout this transitional period and capitalized on its commanding position to consolidate its power. The party dominated the political landscape by virtue of its military power, effective organization and leadership, and control of the agenda and rules of competition. It structured the transition around new ethnically defined regions, a constitution that emphasized self-determination, and a series of largely uncontested elections.

(Lyons 1996: 121)

What Lyons is describing, in fact, was that in May 1995 a national election was held to elect the members of the House of Representatives of the new parliament that marked the end of the political transition of post-1991 Ethiopia. The process culminated with the newly elected parliament

ratifying the constitution in August that year. Here, what is apparent is that, with civil society under siege and the emerging opposition unable to compete on equal terms with the EPRDF (and so boycotting the election altogether), the EPRDF's position became steadily stronger in the absence of any credible political opposition. Indeed, the 1995 election and the ratification of the constitution established an ethno-federal Ethiopian state, cementing and confirming the dominance of former rebel leaders as the new political elite.

As a consequence, the newly elected parliament's members' main roles emerged as nothing but to approve everything the leaders of the coalition (most of whom were also "elected" parliamentary members) put on the table. In August 1995, therefore, the parliament approved the first-of-its-kind ethnic federal constitution, which effectively transformed the Ethiopian state and targeted the promotion of group rights more broadly even than the Transitional Charter had attempted.¹³ Thus, for most of the political opposition and neutral observers of Ethiopian politics throughout the life of the EPRDF, it was evident that the current constitution was not written and ratified in the interests of the Ethiopian public but, rather, those of the TPLF-led EPRDF elites alone.

The 1995 Ethiopian constitution

One of the first interviews conducted at the start of the fieldwork in preparing for this book was with an individual who had served the TPLF/EPRDF government since 1991, holding various Cabinet positions. The interview entirely focused on learning his assessment of how the ethnic federal arrangement had unravelled in the country since it became official in 1995, when the constitution was published in *Negarit Gazeta*. The interviewee argued, however, that the federal constitution in Ethiopia "should not be characterized as an ethnic federal model".¹⁴ According to him, the constitution was designed to address the issues of individual rights and group rights alike, without favouring one over the other. Moreover, the individual stated that, although the constitution bestowed powers for self-administration to many groups in the country, its ultimate goal was also to safeguard the national unity of the state. Many who study the country's federalism disagree, however, by explaining that, from the nature of the formation of the regional states to the electoral politics within those newly formed states, the federal constitution in Ethiopia promoted ethnic rights and the country's politics, by in large, to become ethnically centred. Jon Abbink, another scholar who has closely followed the coming into existence and implementation of the federal arrangement, states,

According to the policy of the EPRDF-led government (in power since 1991 and confirmed in a general election of sorts in May 1995) ethnic identity has been declared the ideological basis of political organization and

administration and has also been enshrined in the Federal Constitution of December 1994 defining the outlines of the new Ethiopia.

(Abbink 1997: 159)¹⁵

Obviously, one very significant development in the Ethiopian constitution, as mentioned earlier, was that of the political elite's intention of promoting the group rights agenda that was engrained in their political platforms, starting from the armed struggle. In fairness to the constitution, it mentions "full respect of individual freedoms"¹⁶ as the most important part of its making. It is also critical to note the obvious, however, that most of the constitution focuses on the group rights agenda. Another interviewee, who had actively participated in the writing of the transitional charter and who later closely followed the processes of the drafting of the 1995 constitution, also argued that, in times of conflicts arising between the individual's rights and that of the regional state that administers a certain ethnically classified region or local government (and thus protects group rights within the defined territory), the latter would always have the upper hand in any bureaucratic decision-making processes or court proceedings and debates. The system, according to this individual, was created to function in such a way that individual grievances are undermined and only group rights representing what the regime refers to as "Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples" are given more weight.

Certainly, the above individual has a point. In this respect, see how the federal constitution's preamble starts:

We, the Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples of Ethiopia: strongly committed, in full and free exercise of our right to self-determination, to building a political community founded on the rule of law and capable of ensuring a lasting peace, guaranteeing a democratic order and advancing our economic and social development ...¹⁷

The current constitution indeed puts greater emphasis on the promotion of groups and their rights; and such rights could belong to what the constitution refers as "Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples". But how was the EPRDF coalition, which essentially functioned as one party and was in charge of the administration of the four largest regional states, also empowered by the constitution? In addition, how was the constitution designed to also empower and cement the dominance of the so-called "EPRDF affiliate" political parties in the states that the government used to refer as "developing" regional states? These are the questions that this chapter now discusses more broadly.¹⁸

All the regional states in Ethiopia have also ratified their own constitutions; and assessing these constitutions' presentation of the foundations for the peoples' rights within their respective regions is crucial. As an individual who has served the post-1991 Ethiopian state in different capacities claimed,¹⁹ most of the political elite believed that the federal constitution and all other

rulebooks of the state are designed so as not to put national unity and the people-to-people relationship in jeopardy.

According to interviewee 4, however, who worked as a federal prosecutor in Amhara regional state in the 1990s, although the federal constitution is not written in any way to be against national unity (which many critics claim when referring to the constitution), careful study of the regional states' constitutions shows that they focus on the rights of ethnic groups in their respective regions and make mention of historical rights that gave birth to the rights that they enjoy today.²⁰ This assertion is convincing, as the historical accounts are explained by the regional states' constitutions, which purposefully remind the citizenry within the regions of what the political elites consider an awful past in ethnic relations in the country, and how their region's new constitution now makes them the owners of their newly minted regions.

The constitutions of regional states in Ethiopia

The regional states' constitutions, also finalized at a similar period to that of the 1995 federal constitution, are starkly similar in the wordings of the articles, and even the number of articles in these constitutions are mostly similar. Just as the federal constitution puts some emphasis on individual rights, the regional states' constitutions also indicate that they will protect the interest of individuals who live in the regional states but whose ethnic origins do not align with what the constitutions would refer to as the "owners" of each state. The problem that is evident with regional states' constitutions, however, is that these political entities in the federal setting lack the necessary enforcement mechanisms to protect such rights, given that they are effectively controlled through a centralist authoritarian party structure across the country with its commitment to suppress individual rights.

In terms of what has been mentioned earlier about how such constitutions are designed, however, it is critical to see that such attempts were crafted in a way, first, to remind everyone of that "awful past" and, then, to depict how the EPRDF-controlled ruling regime should be considered the saviour. The purpose behind the discussion of the "awful past" in all these constitutions was to align the constitutional writing as a solution to the grievances raised by the student movements from late in the imperial era and to the demands by the formerly armed rebels, who now happened to be overseeing the constitution-writing process. Moreover, within that discussion, it is also stated that the rationale for the country's elites making ethnicity the centre of everything political was the perception that Amhara's culture and language (Amharic) was so dominant. In Ethiopian politics, political narratives despising the Amhara, its culture, and the dominance of its language have therefore been the hallmarks of the ethno-nationalist modes of political organizations, which somehow successfully became manifested in the current constitution. Indeed, these grievances of dominance by an imagined enemy (the Amhara)

also contributed to the legitimization of the then armed rebellions' expanding support base.

What is crucial here is the fact that this history contributed to the growth of ethno-nationalism, which now took centre stage in contemporary Ethiopian politics, and it was especially evident in the making of the constitutions of the regional states. Hence, the overall plan behind the design of the constitution in such a way (ethnic and linguistic) was all about punishing a group that was perceived as dominant in the Ethiopian past.

For instance, let us look at a couple of examples (out of many) in how the preamble of such regional constitutions were crafted. Example one is the preamble of the constitution of the Oromia national regional state, which reads as:

We, the people of the Oromo Nation: cognizant of the fact that we have paid enormous sacrifices, with other oppressed peoples of the country, in our unflinching struggle to uproot the oppressive system which, for years, was imposed upon us and perpetuated conditions that relegated our history, neglected our culture, suppressed the growth of our language, violated our human and democratic rights, took away our land, looted our resources and hampered our economic development, thereby threatening us as second-class citizens within our own land and exposing us to hunger, nakedness, illiteracy and destitution; ...²¹

Example two is the preamble of the constitution of the national regional state of Tigray, which reads as:

The people of Tigray are one of the peoples and nationalities of Ethiopia who suffered a lot under the yoke of the feudal system which prevailed throughout Ethiopia. In the period between 1975 and 1991 the protracted armed struggle of the people of Tigray together with their oppressed Ethiopian brothers had been the most impressive feature of the Tigrayan people. In the course of this struggle for peace and democracy, the region made about 60,000 sacrifices in lives and great material destruction. After such a long and bloody war, our people have proved the abolishment of the undemocratic government and formed a Transitional Government. Thus, strongly committed to the full and free exercise of their right to self-determination, to building a political community founded on the rule of law and capable of ensuring a lasting peace, guaranteeing a democratic order, the people of Tigray are on track to advance their economic and social development.²²

As can be seen from the above preambles of the constitutions of select regional states, it is clear that these ethnic members of the federation and their legal documents provide important credibility to the formation of the federal state of Ethiopia, which ended decades of oppression; well, just to their liking.

This assertion in fact raises questions as to who the oppressor was and how that oppression took place. Historians who have closely studied Ethiopia concur with the dominance of the cultures of the north and the oppression of the many others (Levine 1991; Markakis 2003). It is also important to mention, however, that those who ruled the country in the past, though considered as primarily of Amhara, the population in what is known today as the Amhara national regional state were also subject to the same oppression that fellow ethnic groups in the country suffered under. Regardless of this fact, the political elites presiding over the political transition in post-1991 Ethiopia and beyond have made sure that the new regional states' constitutions mention the "awful past" that they went through so they underline the fact that such a history is long gone, thanks to the EPRDF, the saviour. Interestingly, these same political elites have also made sure that the Amhara national regional state's constitution also mentions the oppression and injustice other ethnic groups suffered in the previous regimes. The preamble of the constitution of the Amhara national regional state thus, in part, reads as:

We, the peoples of the Amhara national regional state: having been desirous to do away with the negative impact hindering our overall development which the age-old oppressive system had for long imposed upon us by cruelly suppressing our human and democratic rights and thereby exposing us all to the scourge of poverty and backwardness as a result unjustified economic and social policies in place; being fully convinced of the fact that we had for long been victims of an unbearable harm caused to us directly or indirectly by an atrocious national oppression which had to be committed in the past *on and against the majority of our nations, nationalities and peoples*, and henceforth needs to be corrected and rectified hereafter; ...²³

What is evident from this preamble is that, although it mentions the oppression of the peoples of Ethiopia, which of course includes Amharas, in the first segment, in the second it explains that such oppression was indeed against the "majority" of Ethiopia's ethnic groups. The preamble is implying, therefore, that, whereas the Amhara were among the victims of the oppressive systems in the past, such suffering was not to the level of what others had experienced at large, thus intrinsically acknowledging that "their Amhara forefathers" indeed are to blame. In the recently emerging Amhara nationalism, therefore, we can see that a reaction is slowly developing. And those leading the movement reject the political subjugations of the Amhara, which extend to a forced admission of historical guilt that is non-existent.²⁴

An individual who had served as prosecutor in both the Amhara regional state's Supreme Court of Justice, located in the city of Bahir Dar, as well as in federal courts in the city of Addis Ababa said at length that, although the wordings of the regional constitutions, in their English versions, do not quite resemble that of the stronger wording in their Amharic versions, it is

understandable that the political elites in the EPRDF-controlled regime made sure that the Amhara knew about their historical dominance, and thus needed to own the oppressive history of the past regimes as their own faults. When I pressed the individual to discuss why constitutions, which are the most important legal frameworks, would have even the slightest differences in their versions written in other languages, the individual mentioned that

it is very common and not surprising to see differences in interpretation and, at times, the contents of the many legal and other documents of the government. The government purposefully writes and publishes the same press statement or policy with confusing translations in their Amharic and English versions. They know that the majority of Ethiopians mainly look at the Amharic version and they consider the publication of the English version just to satisfy the needs of donor foreign governments, aid organizations, diplomats, researchers and for the international media's consumption.²⁵

Another interviewee, with a wider social media following, and who considers himself an Amhara political and rights' activist, also related that the current ethnic federal arrangement is anti-national unity. The day-to-day governance of the government at the federal and regional state levels also takes place mostly cognizant of the political elites' efforts in making sure the various ethnic groups are always reminded that whatever level of development they receive is because of the elites' (the former rebel leaders) success in toppling the oppressive military socialist regime. According to the activist, by doing so, the EPRDF hits two targets. First, it makes sure that the various ethnic groups realize that whatever level of development and freedom they are enjoying are historical breakthroughs, and therefore they must feel grateful for their newfound blessings, thanks to the TPLF-led EPRDF. Second, any questions or grievances of the people are answered in a way that ensures such groups become aware of the current regime's best efforts to provide answers, and thus they are asked to remain patient. Moreover, the political elites also mention that, if the current government were to be replaced through any violent and unconstitutional means, whatever levels of historic improvements that they are counting on will be replaced by the old regime remnants' (sympathizers of the old domination of the Amhara) destructive and anti-democratic agenda, which, according to the regime, will work against the majority of the ethnic groups that make up today's federation.²⁶

Failures of the 1995 constitution to protect the rights of minorities and individuals

Immediately after the Transitional Charter, which served as the foundation for the current constitution now in force, the other important test of the newly minted federal scheme was the fate of citizens who continued to

live in the newly constructed regional states, formed along ethnic and linguistic lines. What happened to the protection of their rights, thus, remained an open question. In particular, the fate of individuals who are ethnically Amhara (who suffered the most), Oromo, Tigray, and Gurage, in addition to the many other groups who are known to live all across Ethiopia, and the challenges faced in the protection of their rights in the newly arranged federal setting became dire concerns.²⁷ Despite the federal constitution and the regional states' constitutions claiming to protect the rights of individuals to live in places of their choices, the practicality of it all warrants huge scrutiny.

In the earlier phase after the introduction of the federal setting, ethnically motivated massacres were immediately evident in areas known as Bedeno and Arba-Gugu, which are located in the Oromia regional state. This ethnically motivated violence targeted the Amhara, who the TPLF-led EPRDF considered enemies of the state, and the people responsible for the oppression of many Ethiopian groups in the past (see Amnesty International 1995). Eventually, these ethnic tensions and hate crimes motivated by the highly polarizing politics of the EPRDF expanded across many areas in the Southern Nations, Nationalities and People's Region (Gura-Ferda areas) and the Gambella regional state and continued to occur in the Benishangul-Gumuz regional state, a region that was directly administered by TPLF officials in the name of advising the region's administrators, who they considered weak.²⁸ Such hate campaigns against the Amhara (and northern Ethiopians, or *semenegna*, in Amharic), and also, to a certain extent, against ethnic Oromo, were similarly rampant in Ethiopia's Somali regional state. In the regional state of Gambella, an ethnic group known as the Anuak would repeatedly suffer from routine massacres directed at them by forces within their regional state and the federal military, with the federal government's leaders failing to protect them, instead choosing to deny the occurrence of such massacres.²⁹

In the public sphere and across the Ethiopian opposition media, based mainly in the diaspora, questions as to who perpetrated these criminal acts and why they continue to happen are widely discussed. The facts that the government disregarded the probability that the federal setting could also be a liability moving forward and how it could be managed in the future are ignored, however, as every major opposition, social, and political activist got busy advocating for the sake of the protection, peace, and stability of one or other ethnicity. This remains mainly true to this day, which is the result a system that has managed to sharply reduce the level of respect for Ethiopian unity and replaced it with warring ethno-nationalist political narratives.

What also remains critical is to assess the role of the federal government, especially the security forces, and whether their efforts to control and deter violent incidents were effective. Sadly, their efforts were extremely discouraging, as they continued to purposefully ignore the need to address such issues. An individual who has written at length about the Amhara, who have suffered extensive human rights abuses and forced evictions, and who has

also interviewed many families that have lost family members in some of the massacres, claims:

The federal government's security apparatus, which is highly dominated by the formerly rebel generals of the TPLF, has ignored security situations all across the regional states time and again. Some of the bureaucrats, heads of security offices in some regions, have also secretly told me that, when they tried to stop various conflicts against minorities in the region, "people from higher up" had repeatedly stopped them from preventing the violence.³⁰

A government official since 1991 also agreed with the problems with regard to forced evictions, killings, and arbitrary arrests directed against individuals and minorities in some regional states. The individual said,

Although this federal constitution is the most important victory that Ethiopians achieved in a long and painful struggle, one of its major failings, however, is that it has created narrow ethnic nationalists all across the nation. What we hoped to accomplish was to empower the groups while simultaneously teaching them the essentials of how to respect and protect individual and minority rights. Unfortunately, the lack of proper and sustained training is the reason for the increase in the number of those narrow ethnic nationalists who are less tolerant of others in the regional states that they now administer.

When I pressed the interviewee if he could agree with the notion that the government security forces might have encouraged some atrocities in certain regional states against the Amhara, and to some extent the Oromo, the individual insisted that such questions were "an unfair characterization of the armed forces and the government's efforts to improve good governance across the country".³¹

Most opposition political figures in Ethiopia and abroad in exile, in general, and an individual who provided extended account of his experience (interviewee 35) among such people believe that the coalition, which is mostly dominated by the TPLF leadership, deliberately acted as if it was oblivious to the atrocities happening to minorities (especially Amharas) in different regions. Elites who had dominated the ruling coalition did not care about such atrocities by one ethnic group against another, since they were well aware that the growing division between many of the ethnic groups in the country would mean the continuation of TPLF domination and the EPRDF's hold on political power. This assessment is convincing given what we see in the political elites' efforts to prolong their rule by relying on survivalist political approaches, and the use of the federal setting for such a goal is readily apparent. The assertion by opposition officials is also amenable, however, given how the smaller regional states in the country are constructed

Table 6.1 Demographic description of the Harari regional state

<i>Ethnicity</i>	<i>Population in percentage terms</i>
Oromo	56.41
Amhara	22.77
Harari	8.65
Gurage	4.34
Others	7.83
Total	100

Source: Central Statistics Agency (2008).

Table 6.2 Demographic description of the Benishangul-Gumuz regional state

<i>Ethnicity</i>	<i>Population in percentage terms</i>
Oromo	13.55
Amhara	21.69
Berta	25.41
Gumuz	20.88
Agaw-Awi	4.22
Shinasha	7.73
Others	6.52
Total	100

Source: Central Statistics Agency (2008).

in the current federal setting. For instance, looking at the regional states of Harari and Benishangul-Gumuz, we can see that the number and size of the minority populations in these regions outweigh the number of ethnic groups given the right and authority to administer these regional states as rightful owners.

From what Tables 6.1 and 6.2 (based on Ethiopia's 2007 census) show about the two regional states' demographic make-up, we can infer that the federal structure, with its intent on promoting groups' rights in every aspect of political empowerment in general and groups rights' for self-administration in particular, designed and implemented institutional solutions that in the long run, unfortunately, served as the platform for the emergence of ethnic conflicts that overshadowed its own celebrated rights promotion agenda. Moreover, as is evident from the tables, the Harari regional state, as its name indicates, is created as a region the administration of which "belongs" to the "Harari ethnic group", even though the population size of the group is less than 9 per cent of the total within the state. The problem, as mentioned earlier, is not the fact that such groups are now in charge of the administrative duties of regional states that have, arguably, achieved the right to self-administration but the fact that such an opportunity arrived at the expense of the other

ethnic groups, who actually outnumber the Harari ethnic group; this raises many questions.

The same argument also goes to explain what exactly happened in the Benishangul-Gumuz regional state. In this region, we see that Oromos and Amharas outnumber the rest of ethnic groups in the region; they are considered majority-minorities, given that the administrative apparatus of the region is controlled and all bureaucratic issues are handled by the minorities, which the region's constitution has recognized as rightful owners of the region.

The question that comes up time and again is: why is the institutional design of ethnic federalism so poorly structured? According to an individual who worked in the Amhara regional state's bureaucracy and visited the Benishangul-Gumuz region on many occasions for official duties and party-related missions, for the EPRDF coalition and its dominant elite within the TPLF, empowering minorities made it easier for the co-optation mechanisms. Hence, in such a way, limiting the voice of the majority from becoming a challenging force in any region became an easier albeit rather important political undertaking.³²

Moreover, according to the individual, the fact that there already exist regions that are controlled by Amharas and Oromos – who constitute overwhelming majorities in their respective regions – makes it difficult to give them powers in smaller regions even if they have the population sizes that should have empowered them in these regions as well. And this, according to him, helps the TPLF-led EPRDF's ambition to limit the powers of the country's two major ethnic groups, the Amhara and Oromos. Indeed, the EPRDF's rationale, as explained by the interviewee, was unjust and stood in complete opposition to the ideals of democracy and majoritarian rule. Again, though, for the TPLF elites, who were so afraid of the Amhara political elite and people, the majoritarian principles of democracy were unwelcome. Thus, they had to prevent Amharas outside the administrative borders of the Amhara region within the federal design from assuming any political power. In a famous example, Addis Ababa, the Ethiopian capital and a city with an Amhara majority population, does not enjoy self-administration precisely because of the above view on the part of the TPLF ethno-nationalists.

As indicated earlier, however, regional states that are given to and run by minorities are not devoid of ethnic conflicts. Over the last 29 years, although ethnic groups within the federation had never been officially at war with each other, forced evictions and displacements of minorities, and "mysterious" identity-based massacres perpetrated by organized groups, have been regular features of the dysfunctional federation. The regime is mostly directly blamed for its inability to predict and control such violence. Moreover, the EPRDF regime was also observed to have reacted slowly in restoring calm when conflicts within two or more ethnic groups occurred from time to time.

In addition, the fact that, when different forms of conflict arose, the government was known to either ignore them or make a very slow response that

usually came after the damage had already been done has always raised more questions over the regime's ability to deliver the important public goods of peace and stability. The understanding from my fieldwork is that the regime's inability to take swift measures or, most often, its slow responses to ethnic conflicts emanated from the political elites' desire to empower the minorities running the regions or particular districts within regional states. Even those authors who consider the Ethiopian federal constituents (regional states) to have more powers in comparison with other federations across the world concur with the limitations of this arrangement, although these authors fail to directly address the main reasons for ethnic conflicts or minority oppression as being a result of the weaknesses of the federal setting. Among these, for instance, Assefa Fiseha states that

the federal system assumes that every ethnic group is found inhabiting a territorially defined geographical area. Certainly, it is difficult to adopt federalism unless there exists a territorially defined diversity, but a significant number of Ethiopians do not live in the places where the majority of the members of their ethnic group are to be found. They have moved, either voluntarily, in search of better opportunities, or by force, due to the Dergue's policy of resettlement and villagization.

(Fiseha 2006: 135)

The problems that Fiseha indicates in fact could be attributed to the overall failure of the ethnic federal arrangement. Regardless, at face value, the regime introduced ethnic federal arrangement as a way to regionalize the historically centralized Ethiopian state and promote ethnic rights through fair representation at the central government and to provide opportunities for self-administration. Thus, its successes or failures therefore should be evaluated on the basis of how much this arrangement met its predetermined goals. In this respect, a former official, who is convinced of the successes of the federal arrangement, states:

No doubt that the ethnic federal arrangement has helped certain ethnic groups to come out of the shadows of purposeful ignorance by the imperial and socialist regimes in the past. However, I consider the federal arrangement to also have some failures, because, if the federal arrangement was to be a success, it would have prevented the formation of further ethnic rebellions in the country. As you know, the OLF, since it left the transitional government, has returned to the bushes. The Ogadeni Somalis [an area in south-eastern Ethiopia, within the Ethiopian Somali regional state] under the group ONLF [Ogaden National Liberation Front] had also been fighting the government. The Amhara and other groups were also fighting the government from their bases in Eritrea. Although these rebellions have not seen any successes thus far, as a former insider, I can tell you that they have always unsettled the political

elite within the EPRDF, and especially the TPLF leadership that controls the security and intelligence forces all by itself. Therefore, I believe that, if the federal experiment was a success, some groups would not have raised arms to fight the government in any way. But, since they still have unanswered questions and given that the majority of ethnic groups are witnessing the dominance of an ethnic minority, the feeling of old-era oppression via new institutional means is very much the case in today's Ethiopia.³³

Indeed, the clear dominance of the TPLF in Ethiopian politics and the resulting re-emergence of popular grievances on the part of other groups in the majority was common knowledge among Ethiopians. But it also helps to see the above interviewee's extended answer from the comparative politics literature's assessment of the onset of civil wars – or rebellion, for that matter – since we now have a clear understanding that the ethnic federal setting has not answered the questions of the rebels, who repeatedly reverted to the bushes even after signing agreements. The most debated causes of civil war are mainly attributed to the existence of greed among those who control political and economic power and those who have grievances from other groups' unfair domination of the economic as well as the political sphere (Collier & Hoeffler 2002, 2004; Keen 2012; Stewart 2000).

The issue of how diverse a country is in terms of its number of ethnic groups is not considered a contributory factor for the outbreak of civil wars in general, however. The most important factor that could lead a multi-ethnic state into civil war emerges when a minority is in control of political power and the majority feels neglected or unfairly represented (Fearon & Laitin 2003). What transpired in the Ethiopian state starting from the imperial and the socialist military era is that, although the rebellions were organized with certain forms of ethnic agenda, they never declared war against another ethnic group. They all fought the regime in control of political power at the centre, however, thinking that only its defeat could lead to the empowering of the groups they claim to have represented. In their struggle against centralist regimes in the past (from the 1960s to the 1980s), therefore, rebel groups formed along diverse ethnic lines were also coordinating with each other to defeat the regimes in power. According to them, doing so could usher in a new Ethiopia. But, in the newly emerged insurgents' fighting against the regime in much of the 1990s and a few years after 2000, the narratives evolved in remarkable ways, given that the new rebels' declared enemies had now become the TPLF and the Tigrayans' domination of the many other groups, which eventually could pose a difficult challenge to the country's future as a whole. In fact, what happened late in 2020, as is presented in Chapter 10, is a testament to such a fiasco.

In this respect, one can infer that the ethnic federal arrangement introduced in post-1991 Ethiopia with the EPRDF's arrival on the political scene has clearly failed. Among other factors mentioned thus far, it did not prevent

insurgencies and rebellions from re-emerging. Not only have the federal constitution and the regional states' constitutions failed to protect minorities' rights and to help the Ethiopian state remain unified amid the challenges it has faced over time but also most now consider the constitutions (both national and regional) as the ruling coalition's ploy for prolonging its political survival, which it managed to do until an internal EPRDF political disagreement eventually ended the coalition.

Even when we look beyond the atrocities directed against individuals and minorities in some regional states, without the need to dwell on who incites and who perpetrates such acts, we see that the political rights that such minorities and individuals enjoy as citizens when residing in regional states that do not align with their ethnic identities are extremely limited. Despite the fact that the regional constitutions and the federal constitution have clauses that call for safeguarding the rights of these individuals and minorities to live in their preferred localities all across the nation, they fall short of explaining the mechanisms that will aid such minorities and individuals' in having a say in the governance of the localities that they are part of as residents. Endaweke Tsegaw, who has studied the rights of minorities in the regional state of Harari in particular, argues that the federal constitution

does not recognize these segment[s] of the population [“the minorities in regional states”],³⁴ and practically they are placed in a status between citizen and non-citizens of the State for only they can elect persons who are not representative of their ethnic groups because language requirement of the electoral law – which imposes the criterion to speak working languages of the state or one of the local vernaculars of the indigenous groups of the state. Eventually, since the Constitution has no room for such middle status, they are better deemed to be non-citizens.

(Tsegaw 2010: 8)

From Tsegaw's unpublished thesis, we can see that the problems in the federal structure are many, and what is even more interesting is that individuals with high-profile positions within the TPLF-led EPRDF coalition do not deny the existence of particular problems, while declining from commenting on the measures that should be taken to reform these institutional solutions, as my encounters with a few officials from the regime's ruling elites in my fieldwork attest.

In addition, it is also important to look at how the citizens' trust of the coalition in power has been significantly diminished over time. Terrence Lyons (2006) states that, as the electoral manoeuvres of the EPRDF were too repressive in many of the national elections held after the regime came to power in 1991, peoples' trust in these democratic procedures reached a historic low point. In this context, from what I witnessed in my fieldwork, what is interesting is that most of the interviewees who are former EPRDF political elites, either in retirement, exiled, or still working for the regime (even

after the Prosperity Party replaced the EPRDF) in power, all concur with the notion that the people, in general, do not trust their government. And what is even more interesting is that the political elites within the EPRDF leadership are openly aware of the people's lack of trust in the coalition they have presided over since 1991. In fact, in EPRDF-run Ethiopia, it is impossible to distinguish incumbent party politics from a government bureaucracy; in short, party rules government.

But this lack of trust also worried EPRDF officials. A former official who was a member of the TPLF leadership, for instance, argued in his interview that, in the annual and at times semi-annual evaluations of the work of the incumbent political coalition, many debates started with questions to assess the level of trust the regime enjoyed at that particular time.³⁵ According to the individual, the EPRDF leadership discusses areas where protests of any kind occurred, suggestions or criticisms from the domestic and international press, and outcries from the much-weakened opposition groups. Once the elite receive and analyse such issues, they start to debate what the coalition should do in order to address the complaints that come from the spectrum of voices. At these meetings, the coalition emphasizes the need to get more attractive reviews from the media, and facing less criticism from the international human rights organizations must be a renewed goal. According to the interviewee, such evaluations are especially important around the time local or national elections are held, because, in the opinions and understandings of the TPLF-dominated EPRDF's political elite, it is clear that the people are always on the side of the opposition. And the people were sympathetic to the helpless political parties dreaming of ousting the EPRDF coalition from political power. But it was also already clear that, in the absence of a level playing field and with heightened abuse and arbitrary arrests of their members and leaders, the chances that the opposition parties might have been able to challenge the EPRDF amounted to zero.³⁶

In general, from the discussions presented in the chapter thus far, we see, first, that the democratic opening that was evident at the beginning of the transitional political order amounted to nothing but a deception, designed to elevate citizens' enthusiasm for the then just concluded regime change and gain international as well as domestic legitimacy. Second, the institutional solution of ethnic federalism was primarily designed to answer the age-old questions of ethnic grievances and inequality did not result in the desired outcome. Instead, the implementation of this institutional solution led to the emergence of a dominant-party state, made possible via the ruling coalition's successful creation of a party structure that dominated the state of politics across all levels of the federal setting.

Conclusion

From the discussions of how post-1991 Ethiopian politics unfolded, it is apparent that the fact that the ruling coalition's intent on promoting the group

rights agenda backfired against minorities in the regional states led to the emergence of ethnic tensions, and the promises of democratic opening that were evident in the first year of the transitional charter era vanished. It is also critical to note, however, that, as a newly established authoritarian regime, the ruling coalition's mechanisms to assert its rule had to go beyond its creation of an ethnic federal setting, which now seems to have balanced ethnic interests as a result of the self-administration rights given to the regional states, at least with regard to claims. This does not mean, however, that these regional states enjoy the political autonomies outlined in the federal constitution, as much of the discussion in the chapter has indicated.

Instead, the regime's efforts in making sure such ethnic interests were represented through the creation of regional states along ethnic and linguistic lines have led to claims of victory for the regime, as it succeeded in bestowing such rights, unlike its predecessors; and these claims of success have persuaded the regime's elites to believe that they have gained the needed political legitimacy to rule. Unfortunately, the political elites seemed content with their introduction of this institutional solution to address the historical grievances while ignoring the political will and governance needed in affirming their efforts to address the questions of inequality. The federal constitution and its replica regional constitutions, successfully designed and implemented by the TPLF-led EPRDF's political machine, resulted in more ethnic violence, more violations of rights, and weakened national unity. Nonetheless, these structural frameworks, on the face of it, were able to keep the EPRDF in power for some 28 years, which was quite an impressive feat in its own right.

Notes

- 1 The constitution came into effect from February 22, 1987.
- 2 The Transitional Charter, published by a "peaceful and democratic transitional conference of Ethiopia". *Federal Negarit Gazeta*, 50th year – no. 1, Addis Ababa, July 22, 1991, page 1.
- 3 Micheau mentions that the fact that self-determination was heavily used even when it looked like groundwork for the emergence of the federal agenda was primarily to indicate the historical domination of the Amhara and to equate that with colonization of other groups within the Ethiopian state (Micheau 1996: 367–368).
- 4 The then president of the transitional government, Meles Zenawi, and his comrade within the TPLF leadership, Abay Tsehaye had in separate interviews mentioned the need for the right to self-determination, and up to secession as that guarantee. For more of these interviews, watch www.youtube.com/watch?v=SPq4pVvONVE and www.youtube.com/watch?v=XeTvULgSfs8.
- 5 The Transitional Charter, published by a "peaceful and democratic transitional conference of Ethiopia". *Federal Negarit Gazeta*, 50th year – no. 1, Addis Ababa, July 22, 1991, page 2.
- 6 The Transitional Charter, published by a "peaceful and democratic transitional conference of Ethiopia". *Federal Negarit Gazeta*, 50th year – no. 1, Addis Ababa, July 22, 1991, page 2.

- 7 The interview with interviewee 21 was conducted in Atlanta, Georgia, on February 26, 2017.
- 8 The interview with interviewee 21, who was a senior EPRDF official, took place in person, and follow-up conversations were undertaken via telephone.
- 9 The Dergue-era Ethiopian army was demobilized and dispersed unceremoniously; see Lefort (2007).
- 10 Although Sarbo mentions the TPLF's role in Eritrea's secession to a certain degree as an agenda initiated and implemented by the TPLF, I believe that the EPLF's struggle was, first, to secure independence for Eritrea. Second, the right to self-determination in the Transitional Charter was signed with the agreement of the OLF, which took part in the drafting of the document. As the quote above shows, however, it was apparent that the TPLF had already embarked on preparing the political framework for its survival from the start, given its treatment of the OLF and the latter's decision to leave its temporary partnership with the TPLF-led EPRDF coalition. See Sarbo (2009).
- 11 The discussion with interviewee 26 was conducted in Snellville, Georgia, on March 5, 2017.
- 12 The main interview with interviewee 22 was conducted on March 20, 2017, in Atlanta, Georgia, a second telephone interview being conducted the next day.
- 13 It is important to note that the federal setting had been in place since 1991; it is just that it became formalized in 1995, once the constitution was officially approved.
- 14 The interview with interviewee 2 was conducted on March 14, 2017, in Washington, DC.
- 15 The characterization of Ethiopia's federal setting as ethnic federalism and the politics as ethnically centred is now the norm in Ethiopian government studies. For more, see Abbink (1997: 159).
- 16 The preamble of the constitution, for instance, makes mention of the individual rights as "firmly convinced that the fulfillment of this objective requires full respect of individual and people's fundamental freedoms and rights, to live together on the basis of equality and without any sexual, religious or cultural discrimination ...". *Federal Negarit Gazeta* – no. 1, August 21, 1995, page 2.
- 17 See *Federal Negarit Gazeta* – no. 1, August 21, 1995, page 2.
- 18 What the government refers as developing regional states are states such as the Afar regional state, the Ethiopian Somali regional state, the Benishangul-Gumuz regional state, the Gambella regional state, and the Harari regional state. Such regional states are administered by ethnic political parties that are considered "EPRDF affiliate parties", and, as we see in this chapter, the elites at the top of these ethnically organized political parties are highly co-opted by the EPRDF political elites, which effectively undermines the constitutional right to self-administration.
- 19 Interviewee 2.
- 20 The interview with interviewee 4 was conducted on March 24, 2017, in Silver Spring, Maryland.
- 21 Oromia regional state constitution, October 1994, proclamation 46/1994.
- 22 The Tigray regional state constitution, June 19, 1995, Mekelle, Tigray regional state.
- 23 The revised constitution of the Amhara national regional state, proclamation 59/2001, emphasis added.
- 24 One of the most formidable political parties that has been growing in popularity among the Amhara in Ethiopia is the National Movement of Amhara (NAMA). To see news of the party's establishment, see Endeshaw (2018).

- 25 The interview with interviewee 3 was conducted on April 3, 2017, in Washington, DC.
- 26 The interview with interviewee 15 was conducted via telephone on February 19, 2017. The interviewee's location will not be disclosed given my agreement with the individual.
- 27 For instance, an individual with huge political power and importance to the Oromo People's Democratic Organization in Addis Ababa, who was also interviewee 31, said: "According to the demographic files within OPDO, the Amharas constitute more than 11 million of the population in the largest regional state in Ethiopia, Oromia regional state."
- 28 The 2013 US State Department report on human rights in Ethiopia states, "Authorities in the western region of Benishangul-Gumuz forcibly evicted as many as 8,000 ethnic Amhara residents from their homes; some of those evicted alleged police beat and harassed them because of their ethnicity" (State Department 2014: 32).
- 29 For instance, for a report on the massacre in Gambella, see Human Rights Watch (2005). For more on the related abuse of minorities and others in Gambella, see Human Rights Watch (2012).
- 30 The interview with interviewee 33 was conducted via telephone and e-mail exchanges on March 17, 2017. The location of the individual will not be disclosed, as agreed.
- 31 Interviewee 2, a former official who served in different Cabinet roles.
- 32 The interview with interviewee 39 took place in a prearranged telephone call on April 3, 2017. The interviewee is based in an undisclosed location in Europe.
- 33 The interview with interviewee 5 took place on February 21, 2017, in Washington, DC. A follow-up telephone interview was conducted on March 6, 2017. Of course, following the political change in 2018 in Ethiopia, most groups that had raised arms against the EPRDF regime returned home to join the peaceful struggle for democracy. Even after its return to Ethiopia, however, the OLF is now back in the bushes to fight the Ethiopian army, yet again.
- 34 The phrase "the minorities in regional states" has been added to clarify the meaning of the reference to "these segment[s] of the population".
- 35 The interview with interviewee 8 took place on April 27, 2017, in Boston, Massachusetts.
- 36 What is interesting is that the demise of the EPRDF in fact occurred after problems from within, and not because of challenges it faced from its opponents at home or in exile.

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7 Ethnic federalism and the EPRDF's systemic co-optation mechanisms for survival

Introduction

The last chapter demonstrated how, in the post-1991 Ethiopia, the newly formed political coalition (the EPRDF) first outlined a Transitional Charter, which promised greater rights, political freedoms, and democratic reforms. Moreover, the charter introduced the basics of the federal structure along ethnic and linguistic lines, which is the one reform that many had considered to be against Ethiopian unity and an arrangement that sowed the seeds of hatred and became a reason for inciting ethnic violence, which has been ravaging the country for a long time. Indeed, the federal setting, as it eventually evolved, has proved to be deficient in many ways. The federal setting's shortcomings in terms of safeguarding minority rights across many regions were therefore detailed. Continuing on the path of elucidation, Chapter 7 explains the ruling coalitions' manipulations of the electoral mechanisms in place while also providing a broader explanation with regard to the Ethiopian state bureaucracy and the power it maintains vis-à-vis the dominant-party structure, which is spread across all levels of government in the country. Moreover, this chapter also explains how the relations between the regional states and the political elites in those regions vis-à-vis the TPLF-led EPRDF coalition at the centre played out.

Electoral mechanisms in Ethiopia's ethnic federal setting

The initial setbacks gave the lie to the pseudo-democratic openings of the post-1991 Ethiopia and opened the door to the unravelling of survivalist strategic interests of the TPLF-led EPRDF political elite, and they started with the OLF's exit from its partnership with the EPRDF in the transitional government. The onslaught directed against the newly emerging free press in that period was also quite an example of how the democratic opening occurred purely for the strategic purpose of legitimizing the new regime's rule from the start. The regime's further assault on that sector grew after the coalition's elite achieved a full grip on political power at the end of the political transition in the early 1990s, with the opposition now weakened. Moreover, it is critical to

note that the opposition groups that were hastily formed by the political elites from the old regimes, as well as by some intellectuals and civilians, were not able to withstand the repressive tactics of the EPRDF coalition; as a result, they even boycotted the series of election from 1992 to 1995 nationally as well as at regional levels, a pattern that continued, as can be seen even after the advent of the new millennium.

Boycotts of national elections by the opposition political parties have been the most common. And the complaints heard among the opposition, the media (especially the international media, given that the domestic media have been extremely weakened), and some observers, however, started with the nature of the country's National Election Board of Ethiopia (NEBE). In post-1991 Ethiopia, the newly designed institutions and the regime's intent to commit to democracy were discussed. The achievements of the new political elite, in fact, cannot be undermined, as what happened in the country was something of a departure from the imperial era or the repressive socialist military regime's highly centralized national politics from previous decades. Unsurprisingly, this centralization also persisted in the EPRDF's Ethiopia, although it occurred by subduing the very ethnic groups that it aspired to protect into accepting the coalition's party structure as their newfound saviour. When it comes to the National Election Board of Ethiopia, however, it is crucial to recall that what remains important is how the NEBE functions, but how the regime effectively manipulates it to succeed in its survivalist agenda becomes a critical question.

The TPLF leadership that dominated the EPRDF coalition appears to have effectively foreclosed on the idea of democratic reforms, as the democratic opening was short-lived. For the regime, it was important to curtail these openings so it could embark on the survivalist political agenda, which it saw as the only option not just for the survival of the coalition but if the programmes they envisaged were to be made to work. The electoral mechanisms and the institutions that manage such elections in this regard were therefore highly exploited instruments of the regime from the start. In this respect, the NEBE right from its founding was no more than an institution that served the interests of the coalition in power. As one of the interviewees mentioned, the officials running the NEBE have always been political appointees, and their main job is to make sure the EPRDF coalition secures institutional cover in the management of fraudulent elections. According to this former official from Oromia region,

[T]he NEBE, which is highly controlled by the EPRDF and an authority or "institution" that gives licences to newly emerging opposition political parties, the "institution" that revokes the licences of such opposition parties and that also allocates the public funding of the political parties competing at any given election period, has always been the EPRDF itself. Therefore, the EPRDF became a political coalition that manages the electoral framework that effectively resulted in the absence of an

independent institution, as the one that exists is nothing but a fake stand-in designed to save the ruling coalition's faces.¹

What the interviewee stated is crucial. As someone who worked for the EPRDF, what the individual argued implies is that the electoral board, which had to project an important level of political independence, has failed tremendously in its institutional responsibilities, because, as can be deduced from its actions, it is there to do nothing but serve as institutional cover for the ruling coalition's survivalist agenda.

According to further explanations by the interviewee, expecting the NEBE to be impartial and fair was a difficult ask; and the opposition's lack of trust towards the board was not surprising. As Jon Harbeson (1998) explains, the institution was not impartial, given how it came into existence in the first place. Harbeson states,

The National Election Commission² came into being in December 1991. It was composed of ten members of the Council of Representatives, representing the major political groups within the council. The commission oversaw all aspects of the 1992 elections. The EPRDF issued Proclamations 9 and 11, establishing the legal and institutional framework for the elections. The commission then issued a comprehensive set of rules for implementing these proclamations.

(Harbeson 1998: 119)

What we can see here is that the NEBE, per Harbeson's explanation, as opposed to managing the electoral competition in a fair manner and ensuring that the diverse groups in the country had the opportunity for fair representation, it emerged as another institutional mechanism that the political elite within the TPLF-led EPRDF leadership (all being coalition parliamentary members) successfully manipulated and co-opted. Certainly, it was not a surprising matter, as those serving in various institutions within federal Ethiopia did nothing but support the survivalist agenda, depriving institutions that should have been independent of their independence, and the coalition's work in general formalized such co-optation mechanisms across the board more effectively. As Harbeson clearly states in the above quote, the formation of the NEBE was even facilitated after ten individuals were picked from the pool of members in the transitional government's parliament, which was, of course, completely dominated by the EPRDF and its affiliated regional parties. This is surely evident from my discussions with interviewee 2, a long serving government official, noting that his argument was also agreed with by many others, and who stated that "competing against the EPRDF in Ethiopia is like witnessing a very competitive sport with one of the teams also sponsoring and selecting the team of referees who oversee the competition, immediately leading to questions on the integrity of the games to be played".

In post-1991 Ethiopia, looking at the electoral competitions starting from the transitional period, the EPRDF's role in election management was clear from the outset. Walle Engdayehu (1993), who also studied the first elections in post-1991 Ethiopia, states that, if one measures the elections and management of elections in the country in the transitional period based on the basic tenets of what a free election should be, the elections in that period can be considered complete failures even if that period, to some extent, is viewed as having had a relatively promising democratic opening. From what Engdayehu states, it is also clear why, despite what had been construed as the initial democratic openings and promises of free and fair elections, the boycott of elections by the opposition groups became common from the start. Engdayehu explains the elections conducted in post-1991 Ethiopia thus:

First, it became clear that the boycott of the elections by the major opposition parties left the ruling EPRDF party in control of the regional administrative bodies. This means that when national elections are held for the federal legislative seats in 1993, the regional units of government will be dominated by supporters of the EPRDF, giving that party an edge for its candidates in most of the election districts throughout the country. Second, although any politically organized groups were free, in principle, to compete openly in the elections, the party in power, that is the EPRDF, had a built-in advantage to influence the participation of those groups that it liked or disliked. This was confirmed particularly in the cases of the COEDF (Coalition of Ethiopian Democratic Forces) and Medhin, both of which were not allowed to operate as legal opposition parties. The two exiled opposition groups have continued to report that the EPRDF refused to authorize their participation in the political process. Some observers believe that the two have the potential of unseating the EPRDF in free and open democratic elections. They argue that the efforts to democratize the political system would have had a positive meaning for Ethiopia if the opposition groups had been allowed to compete uninhibited by, and free from, the threat of political intimidation and harassment in all political activities.

(Engdayehu 1993: 42)

From Engdayehu's assessment, it seems apparent that the playing field in electoral competition was skewed in the EPRDF's favour from the beginning, and the old traditions of fake elections as a means to gaining even meagre amounts of legitimacy therefore continued for more than two decades, until there was no credible opposition political party that could stand against EPRDF dominance in any way.

In the extended discussion I had with interviewee 5, an individual who had also served the EPRDF government, holding various Cabinet positions in the

central government and at the regional state level, the interviewee explained the “fairness” of the electoral competition in the country:

I ran for parliament three times, and only I can assure you that I won outright in the first one, since I did not face a direct opponent at all, as the independently running candidate was forced to decide not to compete against me given the mounting pressure he felt from the federal security forces. The second and third times I ran for the Ethiopian House of Representatives [the parliament], both times the internal polling indicated that I would lose my re-election bids in a landslide to the Oromo National Congress’s well-liked candidates. However, the regime made sure that alternative ballots were pre-prepared, and the election results that were announced showed that I garnered more than 70 per cent of the votes in both elections, leaving me as an outright winner.

To my surprise, the interviewee also mentioned that “the election board [NEBE] and some officials within the board were very much aware of what actually transpired in my district, as well as many others where fraudulent election results were also revealed”.

When I pressed the individual to provide examples of how the NEBE addresses complaints by the opposition, the individual stated,

In 2010 one of the officials running the NEBE was asked by a foreign journalist if he can prove the election in the district where I “won” was not fraudulent. And the official responded, saying that “that district in particular had extremely free and fair elections, and in fact the electoral board considers the district as an example of the success of all the elections held during that period”.

From the nature of the type of electoral system and how it functions, it was clear that the NEBE was serving as a stand-in election comptroller, and the ever-increasing presence of the security forces in playing roles of intimidating, arresting and pressuring the opposition parties and their members from challenging the regime in power was common. Moreover, under such a reality, one could easily infer that the TPLF-led EPRDF had emerged as a successful survivalist political coalition out of its tactics of exploiting the very institutional frameworks it had designed and the co-optation mechanisms that successfully manipulated institutions such as the electoral board, as well as the regional and local elites.

The EPRDF and the emergence of a dominant-party state

It was while the May 2010 elections in Ethiopia were taking place, and I was watching the Ethiopian publicly owned television service’s (commonly known as ETV until it changed its name to EBC: Ethiopian Broadcasting

Corporation) English news broadcast, that the journalist reading the news referred the EPRDF's success in winning elections "consecutively" and how that had led to the coming into existence of a "dominant-party system" in the country. The "forty-five" second news item also featured the then Speaker of the House of Representatives, an individual known as Ambassador Teshome Toga. The news, as fully transcribed, reads:

The federal parliamentary speaker, Teshome Toga, said, "The dominant-party state is taking its roots in Ethiopia as the EPRDF has won the national elections consecutively. The EPRDF has consequently won the national elections, as the ambassador said, adding that this shows Ethiopia is transforming into a dominant-party system. Ambassador Teshome singled out Japan, Finland and India as living examples where the dominant-party system has developed. Though political parties were not able to assume power by winning elections, there is a wider opportunity for them to have their say on issues of national interest and concerns, Teshome said. He noted the dominant-party system will not limit the multi-party system.³

The existence of dominant political parties that win consecutive elections in democratic states is in fact common, and it does not take away from the democratic characters of such countries in many ways. The problem with Ethiopia's experience, however, is that, as opposed to the May 2010 elections, it was the May 2005 national elections that were competitive, and during that particular national election the opposition, for the first time, was able to galvanize huge popular support, even winning the election until the EPRDF decided otherwise and the then prime minister, Meles Zenawi, declared a curfew and a state of emergency the day after the election.⁴ Such incidents and their significance will be explained in the second half of this chapter, which, broadly, discusses the most pivotal times in the evolution of Ethiopia's federalism and the EPRDF's success in its survivalist strategies. Nevertheless, after most of the opposition politicians decisively won the 2005 election but instead were sent to prison, the resulting situation signified the end of the meagre democratic opening during that era (the second time, after the other relative opening during the transitional period in the early 1990s), the regime's political elites learned their lessons, and the May 2010 national elections would emerge as the most boycotted of all, since the EPRDF was able to win 99.6 per cent of the vote – thoroughly confirming the Speaker's assumption of the emergence of a dominant-party state, as we saw from the transcribed public television news above.

To reiterate, in fact it was in the aftermath of that particular election in 2010 that the then Speaker of the House was able to proudly claim the emergence of "a dominant-party state" in the country. It was after this that a top EPRDF leader and key player within the TPLF, and the longest-serving minister at the Ministry of Federal Affairs (this ministry was recently replaced

by the Ministry of Peace after the advent of Abiy Ahmed), Abay Tsehaye, suggested that, if the EPRDF were to lose political power, with most of the opposition complaining about the ethnic background of those in power (given that most power had been in the hands of the TPLF, and thus ethnic Tigrayans), the fate of the country could even resemble what happened in Rwanda. According to his interview, given in the Amharic language, he is heard saying, “The number of major ethnic groups in Rwanda is just two. But imagine what happened in Rwanda repeated itself in our country, where over 80 ethnic groups live together, and the results would be catastrophic.”⁵

The TPLF leadership’s mentioning of the Rwandan genocide was quite common. Even at a certain point in the 2005 election campaign, the ruling elite had often recalled “the notorious Interahamwe group in Rwanda” and used it to describe the Ethiopian opposition and what they would do if a chance of seizing political power emerged.⁶ In making this claim, it became clear not only that the EPRDF coalition and its then elites aspired to assert their dominance by attacking the opposition in this way and scaring the public into supporting them but that such arguments indicated that they would not have open ears to the opposition’s constant demands for free and fair elections, fairness on issues of representation, equitable wealth distribution, and democratic rights for all peoples in Ethiopia.

As Kjetil Tronvoll (2011) states in a summary of what the EPRDF was able to accomplish, by stifling the voice of the opposition and setting the tone for the public that – without its leadership – Ethiopia would proceed into ruins, the only option left, according to the EPRDF elite, was to back the regime. Tronvoll, in his piece about the period prior to the election in May 2010, states:

By ratifying new restrictive legislation and adopting new policies aimed at curbing dissent, the government consciously developed a complex and multi-layered strategy to prevent the political opposition from consolidating and making further political and electoral advances. In the aftermath of the 2005 electoral shock, the EPRDF leadership, and notably the chief ideologist Prime Minister Meles Zenawi himself, authored a number of booklets used to reinvigorate and re-ideologize the party apparatus and to inspire and guide cadres in fulfilling the power ambitions of the party. For instance, in a booklet called *Democracy and Democratic Unity* used in the massive, countrywide teacher training ideology seminars conducted in early 2006 to “explain” the 2005 election result and the following crackdown, and make corrections for the future, it is explicitly stated that the Ethiopian people has a “clear choice between dependency and anti-democracy forces (utilizing tools of chauvinism and narrow nationalism) and revolutionary democracy (peace and developmentalism) ... No Ethiopian can stand on middle ground or be neutral.” During the massive re-ideologization campaign undertaken after the 2005 elections (commonly referred to as “capacity-building” seminars and supported

through donor basket funding), the EPRDF and the Prime Minister deliberately employed an alarmist language, aiming to polarize the political landscape and to convince the people that, without EPRDF in power, Ethiopia would turn into chaos.

(Tronvoll 2011: 123–124)

Tronvoll's argument corroborates what the political elites interviewed for this project stated. According to them, how such mechanisms played out cemented the ruling coalition's dominance in the country in general and the TPLF's domination of the coalition in particular.

The EPRDF and patron–client relations in an ethnic federal setting

As the literature discussed in earlier chapters shows as to what leads certain authoritarian or semi-authoritarian regimes to rule longer, what surfaces most is that success in terms of political parties' survivalist approaches is primarily tied to how they amass support among the party members who are available in various leadership positions within the party structure, as well as those tasked with administering local governments. In the case of the PRI, in Mexico, the party made sure the rents are somewhat distributed along party lines and its cadres from the lower party positions received their share of the benefits, which helps explain the outcome of relatively little challenge being mounted against the elites with higher party positions (Magaloni 2006). In the case of some Middle Eastern monarchies, the role of family and relatives who control the most important positions of the state led to outcomes of stability in ruling regimes (Herb 1999). In general terms, however, as discussed in Part 1 of the book, finding an argument that explains most cases, especially the ones in sub-Saharan Africa, is difficult. In most single- or multi-case studies of African states, as well as comparative cross-case studies, though, one important explanation looms larger than others, and that is the issue of institutions and institutional settings.

Jennifer Gandhi and Adam Przeworski's (2007) seminal argument, for instance, states that the ruling elites' enclosure of potential challengers in their coalition make-up and legislative assemblies across the political spectrum could lead to the outcome of regime survival. Taking this and applying it to various cases of parliamentary systems in which the need for coalitions is the only and ultimate option in creating a fifty plus one voting bloc in semi-authoritarian states where there exist periodic quasi-competitive elections could in fact show that the authors' argument does a good job of explaining such cases. Nonetheless, applying it to Ethiopia, the argument still falls short, given that the dominant party apparatus of the EPRDF coalition is nowhere near to appeasing or incorporating opposition figures in its executive or legislative setting since the ruling coalition basically functions as a single political party that is unwelcoming of unwanted guests – i.e., the opposition. Although this indeed is the case, the authors, consistent with those who claim the

existence of clientelist relations (Bratton & van de Walle 1997), also argue that “co-opting by distributing spoils and co-opting by making policy concessions entail different institutional mechanisms” that could help such regimes survive longer (Gandhi & Przeworski 2007: 1282).

This assertion shows that institutions and how they are designed play equally huge roles in the survivalist strategies of political elites in charge of authoritarian and semi-authoritarian regimes. To reiterate earlier arguments from this work thus far, institutions and the strategic interests of the elite in coming up with these very institutional designs and then how they manipulate them to serve those strategies play equally important roles. Hence, the ethnic federal setting, starting from the constitution to the design of regional states and per the results witnessed from decreasing national unity to the emergence of ethnic conflicts, all contributed to the EPRDF coalition’s emergence as the sole authoritarian caretaker of the Ethiopian state until 2019. Questions as to how the institutional setting within federal Ethiopia shaped the clientelist nature of regional state–federal relations, although explained earlier as well, should still be further examined. In doing so, the attempt here is to focus more on the co-optation mechanisms in play within centre–regional state relations in the ethnic federal framework by using secondary resources from seminal published works.

The case of the Somali regional state

The Ethiopian Somali regional state, which has renamed itself as the Somali national regional state since 2018, is a region in Ethiopia that had its share of suffering as a consequence of Somalia’s invasion of Ethiopia in the imperial and military socialist regime eras. Somalia’s irredentist agenda of creating a greater Somalian nation has indeed caused unprecedented amounts of violence and suffering in this particular region. Moreover, Ethiopia’s ethnic Somalis have also suffered under low levels of representation in previous regimes and the introduction of ethnic federal arrangements in post-1991 Ethiopia, which bestowed the opportunity of self-administration on Somalis, arousing enthusiasm and hope in that part of the country. Unfortunately, even under federal Ethiopia, the country’s Somali citizenry long remained under-represented. Although the federal arrangement and its advocates touted greater freedom for diverse groups, facts about how that particular regional state (in short, the Somali region) is administered and the powers and autonomy the regional state’s elites enjoyed exhibit a different outcome.

One of the extended interviews I conducted in field research was with an Ethiopian official from the Somali region. The individual had served within the regional state and, prior to that, had lived most of his life as a businessman in the city of Jijiga, the capital of the regional state. According to him, in his long experience of working in the region and for the regional state, he had never witnessed the regional state enjoying the autonomy that the federal constitution had granted to the newly created members of the federation. Indeed,

other regional states had never enjoyed such rights anyway, but we find that the Ethiopian Somalis' regional state appears to have worse outcomes even in comparison to other regions. First, the individual argued that

the region and its people, as we all know, were one of the most forgotten regions by previous regimes. And the fact that, once the federal arrangement was put into place and created wider sets of openings for the emergence of regional elites, that would take advantage of the opportunity to become new regional political elites was very welcome. And such political openings led to competition among those who wanted to show their capabilities as poised and experienced leaders by appearing in front of those who come from the central government to help the Ethiopian Somalis make that transition of administering their own region. The competition was quite intense. The problem, however, was that the political elite that came from the centre wanted to make sure that they elect not individuals according to their educational qualifications or experiences, but the main criterion seemed to be "who is trusted more". Unfortunately, the issue of trust became the rationale in that decision-making process of organizing and establishing a properly functioning Ethiopian Somali regional state.⁷

Given that the Somali leadership in that region was assembled in ways that were not popular among the region's populace, Ethiopian Somalis had been condemned to live in the shadows of political violence. Reflecting tensions across the Ethiopia–Somalia boarder and the presence of armed rebellion, whereby the Ogaden National Liberation Front had constantly fought the country's military until recently, the presence of the Ethiopian defence forces in the region in huge numbers was always easier to witness. The role of the Ethiopian military, as one of the institutions of the state highly dominated by the TPLF, besides fighting against the ONLF and other insurgents, also expanded to overseeing the regional elites and regional governance in the region. Moreover, the military, which was led by Tigrayan generals, also had the mission and the legitimate authority (via political assignment) to dismiss and appoint the regional state's leaders as it wished.

To provide another example from the same region, see what Abdullahi Hussen, an individual who had worked for the regional state as a personal advisor to the regional state's president and close confidant, said in an interview he gave to Ethiopian Satellite Television and Radio (ESAT), based in Washington, DC. The individual explained that the regional state's president, Abdi Mohamoud Omar, commonly known as Abdi Iley, received his orders directly from the general based in the regional state.⁸ According to him, "General Abraham not only receives reports and gives orders in any administrative matter that ranges from budgetary issues to security matters, but also I believe that he is the one who is indirectly administering the state."⁹ When pressed by the journalist about how that actually happened in practice

and what the benefits were of administering such a big regional state for the general, Abdullahi responded by saying that the regime was convinced that the only way that the Ethiopian Somalis were able to now claim their own regional state and enjoy the “self-administrative rights” was because of the sacrifices the TPLF leadership and its former rebel soldiers had made in the armed struggle that ousted the military regime. Therefore, as a way to build the administrative capacity of the regional state, close supervision of the state by central elites, mainly those elites within the TPLF and its generals, was deemed important.

What was mind-blowing in this interview, however, was the footage of a secretive meeting that the regional state president had conducted with Ethiopian Somali clan leaders, provided to the media outlets by Abdullahi, at which the regional state’s president is heard and seen explaining how, for the ethnic Somalis to keep their interests, grow their capacity, and have a greater say in the country’s politics, the only possible way was by working closely with the Tigrayan elites. In the interview, the regional state’s president, Abdi Mohamoud Omar, claims:

Today, the Tigrayans love the Somalis more than any ethnic group in the country. The problem is, however, we the Ogadenis [Somalis]¹⁰ are the ones that are causing the regime problems while the truth is that what the Tigrayans aspire to is to arm us, strengthen us and lead the nation together with us. The Tigrayans do not want to see only one thing – that is, the Amharas being able to control the Ethiopian state ever again. We Somalis consider the Oromos, the Gurages, and the Tigrayans, and others as if they are all Amharas, because we are uncivilized, and we cannot even distinguish all these groups from one another. That has been the problem that kept us from developing and growing. Unless we are now able to learn and differentiate among such groups, they all can work together and rule over us like before. Make no mistake: when an Ethiopian Somali goes to Addis Ababa, he immediately works with the Tigrayans, who are extremely dominant at the central government. And know that all other major ethnic groups are so divided that the chances they can all cooperate and work together are slim. Therefore, we have to take advantage of that.¹¹

What we see in the Ethiopian ethnic federal arrangement in general, of course, is that the political elite within the TPLF, the dominant force ruling the EPRDF coalition and the brains behind this institutional design of the ethnic federal setting, had made sure that the setting served nothing but the production of political elites conducive for their manipulation strategies and co-optation mechanisms, which were in play for realizing the survivalist strategies of incumbents at the centre – i.e., mainly TPLF officials. In this respect, finding honest and sincere “confessions” by the co-opted elites themselves, of which President Omar of the Ethiopian Somali region could be the best

example, is more telling of such institutional schemes of survival than anything else.

Tobias Hagmann, who conducted extensive field research in the Ethiopian Somali regional state and identified the mechanism that co-opted regional states' elites, also argues that that region in particular could be explained in terms of the traces of "neo-patrimonialism, institutional instability, and patronage relations" (Hagmann 2005: 509). Consistent with the arguments from my findings in my field research and other information presented on how the regional state is "indirectly" run by the TPLF, Hagmann also broadly states this phenomenon in the Ethiopian Somali regional state thus:

Generally, the insecurity of state institutions and agents engenders systematic instability. Ever since 1991, instability has been omnipresent within the executive branch of the Somali region. Under the EPRDF regime, regional presidents have become "perishable commodities". No former president lasted for more than three years, and for half of this period they were subject to federal investigation. The first three presidents were charged with corruption, abuse of authority, and other crimes, and their successors usually met a similar fate. The ruling party's central committee dismisses large parts of the regional cabinet each year, usually at the start of the new budget year (July). In addition, it's common for government officials to circulate between the regional bureaus, seldom maintaining their position longer than one year. This has led to a situation in which the people never ask themselves "How does the regional government perform?", but rather "How long are they going to stay in power?"

(Hagmann 2005: 517)

The underlying reality in this particular region is that – in part because of what Hagmann explains above – between 1992 and 2010 there were 12 presidents of the regional state whose presidency ended either when they barely escaped with their lives or when they removed from their position of power, or even detained. As we see from Hagmann's close observations of the state, and given earlier explanations about how the so-called "developing regions", such as the Ethiopian Somali region, were governed through co-optation, the EPRDF's affiliated regional parties that administer regional governments will have to be content with ever-increasing control by the central government's elites if they choose to remain in power.

The nature of the patronage system thus relies on the elites at regional governments accepting that they will be staying put and enjoying relatively low levels of rent from corruption. Such a relationship then becomes an insurance policy that protects them from the federal elite's scrutiny as long as they are not suspected of conspiring to "increase their region's level of political autonomy" vis-à-vis those at the centre and start to ask questions. In return, these levels of purposeful ignorance by regional elites as to how the TPLF elites' manipulate their regional states afford them legitimacy in the eyes of

the TPLF leadership and ensure longevity for their rule of such regions. Next, I also highlight of a couple of other regional states and how centre–periphery relations under the ethnic federal setting in Ethiopia further unravelled in favour of the survivalist ambitions of the EPRDF coalition and its dominant elites from the TPLF.

In a further effort to show how the ethnic federal setting was promoted and implemented as a response to the age-long calls for reforms that would correct the political and economic inequality across ethnic groups in the Ethiopian state, although it has become clear that it has become an utter failure, I now look at another highly marginalized state, both in the past and the present: the regional state of Gambella.

The case of the Gambella regional state

The Gambella regional state, like the Somali region, also went through various political and economic misfortunes. The region is located in the south-western part of the country. Due to its geographical proximity to South Sudan, which has had its share of civil wars and instability both before and after its independence, the region has seen much violence. The region also remains highly populated by the South Sudanese refugees camped there to avoid the gruelling civil war testing their new nation. The fact that ethnic groups from Gambella happened to be cross-border or transnational societies who live in both South Sudan and Ethiopia also makes the region's problems similar to the Somali region and its societies, with Somali groups (mostly in the form of clans) also living across the border in Somalia, the *de facto* state of Somaliland, Kenya, and Djibouti.

Groups in Gambella suffered from under-representation in previous Ethiopian regimes and had a demographic make-up that was always shifting, sometimes in dramatic ways, as a result of the settlement programmes of the military regime, which brought many citizens from the northern highlands (mostly Amharas, and to some extent Oromos) to the region (Feyissa 2006). For Ethiopians in Gambella, the post-1991 ethnic federal arrangement therefore, at first, brought new optimism, as it was perceived as a design bringing about solutions that would alleviate the region and the ethnic groups in the area from the problems of the prolonged history of inequality.

The problem within this regional state is two-dimensional, however, which is quite different in comparison with other regional states. The regions that were discussed in the last chapter, such as the Harari regional state and the Benishangul-Gumuz regional state, have usually had one-dimensional problems, in the sense that those who control the administrative apparatus of the regional state usually oppress minority rights. As a result, those regional state elites that oppressed some minority rights received their share of blessings from the TPLF-controlled central government, which either acted oblivious to what happened against such minorities and individuals or took time to respond when under pressure. The same is true of the Ethiopian

Somali regional state, where various forms of oppression could be seen along clan and tribal lines, but, given that the regime's military generals were in control of the political climate in the region, most of the blame for the atrocities committed against minorities can therefore be attributed to the regime's dictating of terms in the region. In Gambella, however, inter-ethnic relations and the conflicts that are prevalent in the region are mostly witnessed in conflict between Gambella's ethnic groups themselves, as well as in conflict between the indigenous population and the settlers who came because of the so-called villagization programmes from the previous regimes (Feyissa 2006; Kurimoto 1997).

The federal setting, starting from its implementation in 1991, therefore attempted to address these issues in different ways. Two ways stand out. First, the regime effectively empowered the indigenous peoples, especially the Nuer, who the political elites considered as an ally given their suspicions about the majority ethnic group within the region, the Anuak, who were considered collaborators of the old regimes and, therefore, were not trusted with political powers. Second, the EPRDF elite, with the region's fertile land and untapped resources in mind, militarized the regional state and empowered its military leaders to also interfere in regional administrative affairs, thus weakening the autonomy of the newly created regional state. The EPRDF's use of the TPLF-dominated military in so-called "developing regions" such as Gambella was also clearly evident from my discussion of the role of the generals in administrative decision-making processes in the Somali regional state. The need to unleash the military emanated from the regime's fears of such regions' geographic/climatic features, which were considered to make them potential safe havens for anti-regime armed resistance fighters. Recalling what I discussed with respect to ethnic conflicts and gross human rights violations, especially those perpetrated against the Anuak, makes the argument above make even more sense.

As an individual who is an ethnic Oromo but has lived all his life in the Gambella region corroborated,

The TPLF-led regime understands that effective control of the Gambella regional state implies the creation of a security zone that prevents a potential rebellion from breaking in the region's conducive terrains and rainforest that could be challenging to the regime's control. Secondly, the region's fertile lands are economically so important, which means that any problems that potentially arise from the natives, especially the Anuak majority, had to be kept in check.¹²

According to the individual, the Anuaks' suffering in the region, which always garnered international attention thanks to headlines of massacres, and even allegations of genocide, had always remained the ruling elites' headache. Thus, making sure the regional elites became highly controlled patrons of the central elites based in Addis Ababa was the only option to assert effective control.

Any challenges that came from the regional elites in Gambella therefore led to arrests of the leaders, including one of the region's former presidents, who was jailed on bogus charges, although his main crime, most believe, was that he attributed the killings of the Anuak to the regime's military in the region.¹³

By looking at various assessments of the regional autonomy of the Gambella regional state and how the federal setting fell short of its initial promise, Dereje Feyissa (2006) states that, instead of correcting the historical failures, what the regime introduced was nothing but a "renewed interaction of dominance" between the central and regionally empowered elites. The author further states:

The primary reason why the federal experiment is faltering is that the post-1991 political order has produced new and insecure political minorities, and the political actors have failed to strike a political bargain and articulate a regional interest. Instead, they have sought to capture fragments of the regional state and its institutions. In the event, they have increasingly recognized and exploited the rationality of violence in the politics of group entitlement.

(Feyissa 2006: 215)

This argument clearly articulates the notion of a failing federal experiment. As stated earlier, however, what is evident in Gambella is a pattern of using a certain region's political peculiarities to the federal political elites' benefit in terms of nothing but political survival, as is apparent in the cases of other regional states, from Benishangul-Gumuz to Somali and from Harari regional state to others. Feyissa also further elaborates by bringing into the equation the issue of individual rights versus group rights, when he states that "the problematics of group rights are also acted out amongst the locals, making the issue of entitlement and ownership ever more contestable" (Feyissa 2006: 217). This was indeed a challenge in addition to the reality that under-represented highlanders, mostly arrived from areas in Amhara and Oromia communities, and now considered minorities within that regional state, were left encountering a two-edged sword of oppression, by both the regional elites in the region and the central government ruling coalition and the military, which indirectly controlled political proceedings in the state.

The general explanations presented in this section, with regard to the existence of political clientelism and the mechanisms of manipulation, as exhibited from the cases we have seen thus far, could suffice in terms of the goal of the chapter, which, among other things, looks at identifying patron-client relations, and thus the mechanisms of elite co-optation at the regional state level that aided the survivalist ambitions of those controlling political power. Overall, as the book's main purpose is to explain how such a federal ethnic setting enabled the political elites at the centre (mainly the TPLF leadership and their allies within the coalition), understanding how the federal experiment also unravelled in the bigger and more influential regional

states administered by the member parties of the EPRDF coalition becomes essential.

In the extensive field research, I undertook to attempt to collect the most information with regard to how the ruling coalition actually operated until 2019, when the Prosperity Party was established, the prevailing explanation that emerged was that the federal elites at the centre, mostly composed of the four member parties (the TPLF, the ANDM [later ADP], OPDO [later ODP], and the SEPDM), controlled proceedings from Addis Ababa. The regional elites in the four regional states of Tigray, Amhara, Oromia and Southern regions implemented the directives that came from their particular party's bosses at the centre – the same elites who were also dominated by their coalition partners from the TPLF.

The Tigray regional state, in the post-1991 political transformation in Ethiopia, though located in the northern periphery of the country, served as the political centre of the TPLF-led EPRDF era. The TPLF and its leadership, having orchestrated the federal setting, organized and created the member parties that would join and create a formidable EPRDF coalition. In actualizing its political aspirations, the TPLF installed strongman Meles Zenawi first as the president of the Transitional Government of Ethiopia and then as prime minister, until his death in the summer of 2012. The TPLF's core leadership, one based in the Tigray regional state's capital, Mekele, and the other in the government in the federal capital, Addis Ababa, controlled the politics of the coalition – and thus the proceedings in each of the four regional states – in a seamless fashion, with challenges usually getting corrected the TPLF way.

Returning to my discussions with interviewees, in the view of a long-serving and once powerful individual at the top of various portfolios for a span of almost two decades, the EPRDF, although a political coalition, actually functioned as a single party, and its cadres at both federal and regional levels operated with strict party discipline.¹⁴ According to the individual, the EPRDF coalition basically ran as “one party” and shaped its election manifestos each national election cycle as such. Therefore, the regional states controlled by the EPRDF member parties had to implement such election programmes in each five-year cycle. And how each regional state performed in its implementation of EPRDF's programmes was evaluated each year as well. Based on the reports signalling the successes and failures of each region to the coalition's leadership, the policy makers at EPRDF headquarter in Addis Ababa either rewarded regional elites for their good performance or intervened in regional affairs so that failures were corrected. Agreeing with what has been described thus far in the anatomy of center–regional state relations, Lovise Aalen, who notes such asymmetric relations in the federal setting, explains,

Ethiopia is today ruled by a coalition party composed of several regionally based ethnic parties. At first sight, this appears to be a party structure which enhances a federal division of power, because the central

government appear to be run by an organization with regional, rather than central bases of power. But practically, the EPRDF is controlling all the regional state governments in the Ethiopian federation, either directly through the member parties or indirectly through affiliate parties. These largely centralized party structures appear to contradict with the devolved power strictures of a federal system.

(Aalen 2002: 81–82)

As Aalen explains, the Ethiopian federal setting is clearly characterized as one of authoritarian party centralism overshadowing the bureaucratic setting of the country's institutions in general. And the multi-party system exists only in name. Thus, it essentially invalidates the regime's claim of a well-functioning ethnic federal arrangement in practice, or even its intent in designing it in the first place. Certainly, given the discussions and evidence presented, the claim can be made that what the regime was about was to fool just about everyone.

It is important to take the ethnic federal setting as it is presented by the regime, however, because it is this ethnically arranged structural setting that ensured the effective manipulation of the system that provided the political elites the platform for their mechanisms of political survival. Hence, in the absence of the federal setting, the regime would have faced great difficulty in creating such survivalist mechanisms compared to what they achieved through their manipulation of the federal setting. In this context, one of my extended interviews with an EPRDF official from the Oromo Democratic Party (formerly OPDO) corroborated the arguments stated above by contending not only that the country was directly run by the EPRDF, which had always been dominated by the TPLF's agenda, but also that there existed what was known as the "government line and the party line". The interviewee said that

the regional states perform effectively better when directions arrive within the lines of the government's bureaucratic setting, which are mostly about implementing political and economic programmes via policy execution mechanisms. However, at any minute a directive or memorandum that comes from a party headquarter can nullify anything that is being done at both federal and state levels.¹⁵

In a different interview, an individual who had served as an EPRDF youth league member in Addis Ababa, but later joined an opposition political party until he left to live in exile, stated,

The EPRDF headquarter is filled with individuals considered policy wonks of the TPLF and the office provides routine directives to all four of the regions that are under the control of EPRDF member parties as well as party affiliates in developing regional states. But also, the party offices located in the regional states also must receive routine reports from

state capitals, and then such regional offices report back to the EPRDF headquarter in Addis Ababa on how such directives were implemented.¹⁶

The individual shared with me an interesting example in which, at the time he was serving as a youth league leader in the EPRDF's Addis Ababa office, he was even able to receive daily reports from the caretaker mayor of Addis Ababa immediately after the 2005 national elections. The story, according to him, was that the 2005 elections had resulted in a stunning defeat of the EPRDF coalition at the hands of an opposition coalition of parties. After the opposition coalition, known as the Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD), had won all Addis Ababa's parliamentary seats and the regional council's seats, and the EPRDF leaders had subsequently decided to arrest the leaders of the opposition, the city of Addis Ababa had to be run by a hastily organized "independent" caretaker committee controlling the city's administrative matters. What the individual witnessed, however, was that the caretaker administration was immediately ordered to report its daily activities to the already defeated mayor of Addis Ababa, Arkebe Oqubay, who used to be one of the strongmen within the TPLF leadership. Moreover, the interviewee also mentioned that, besides Arkebe, as an EPRDF youth leader of Addis Ababa, he himself was also able to receive and read these reports from the caretaker administration. According to him, such cases are very consistent with how the EPRDF directly and indirectly runs the federally constituted regional states, as well as the two city administrations that fall under the federal government's jurisdiction: the city administration of Dire Dawa and the city administration of Addis Ababa, the capital.

From what is presented above, although Addis Ababa is directly controlled territory of the federal government and a seat of government, which legitimizes the federal government's administration of the city, two takeaways are crystal clear. First, it is not the government that controls administrative issues but, rather, the party apparatus of the EPRDF. And this political dominance is what was visible when looking at the ruling coalition's administration of a city of more than five million even immediately after the incumbent candidates were defeated. Second, the above example looking at Addis Ababa's administration also provides us a further instance of how other regional states in the Ethiopian state are also administratively co-opted and indirectly ruled.

The way in which the city administration of Dire Dawa, which is located between the Somali and Oromia regions, is manipulated by the EPRDF is even worse. In Dire Dawa, Oromos and Somalis alternate administrative duties in what is known as a 40–40–20 arrangement every election cycle, and all non-Oromo or non-Somali Ethiopians in the city are deemed minorities and thus under-represented in a system that its critics even call "apartheid". Each Somali and Oromo group shares 80 per cent of the administrative duties of the city while the remaining 20 per cent is reserved for other "minorities" in the administration. Nonetheless, what we see here is that the powers of the EPRDF, even though it is composed of the four political parties that directly

administer the four bigger regions, outweigh the constitutional framework of the federal setting. This signifies that the Ethiopian state is indeed under the yoke of a centralist party structure that has just one goal: political survival.

In general, it is also vital to note that this centralist party structure, which overshadows the constitutional rulebooks of the state and installs the EPRDF coalition above everything else, is constructed through carefully crafted and implemented co-optation mechanisms that even travel beyond the confines of party offices and the representatives in regional states. In this regard, we also see that the bureaucracy at both the federal and regional state levels is the victim of this survivalist scheme.

The EPRDF and its co-optation of the bureaucracy of the state

As Berhanu Mengistu and Elizabeth Vogel, who studied the bureaucracy's independence under Ethiopia's ethnic federalism explain, the trouble runs deeper in a way that also exposes the federal constitution's intrinsic deficiencies and ambiguities. The authors argue:

For Ethiopia and its ethnic-based government, the character, function and capacity of bureaucracy pose unique questions in terms of achieving bureaucratic neutrality. The requisite preconditions for bureaucratic neutrality and the authenticity of civil service "reform" in such an environment are problematic. For any ethnic federalism, a crucial obstacle to achieving bureaucratic neutrality is that, by definition, ethnic implies separatism while federalism assures that each ethnicity maintains a significant degree of autonomy with less collective accountability for its actions. (Mengistu & Vogel 2006: 210)

Leaving aside for now the problematic nature of the constitution in terms of how it addresses the bureaucracy, however, in line with how Mengistu and Vogel's account captures the main issue, it is crucial to look closely at how the clientelist system eventually became the main feature of Ethiopian bureaucracy across the country's federal setting. In post-1991 Ethiopia, the country's bureaucracy was not empowered to enjoy the level of independence that the rulebooks of the state entail. In the EPRDF's Ethiopia, it happened by design. From the information collected throughout my fieldwork, the process that challenged as well as tarnished the "independent nature" of the bureaucracy mostly starts with the selection and recruitment mechanisms that propel someone to work for the federal or regional state bureaucracy.

These tactics with regard to the bureaucracy also explain the very mechanisms employed by the party structure in its recruitment efforts to fill political positions at different levels of the federal arrangement. Once the selection mechanisms of individuals to work for the professional bureaucracy materialized, those who joined the workforce across various departments, regardless of how well they want to perform with respect to the state's laws,

struggled to evade the party structure, which created the impression among these professionals that they were there at the ruling party's behest. For civil servants, this fact also brought it home to them that failing to abide by the rules of the ruling coalition meant jeopardizing their jobs and the livelihoods of their families. Simply put, what transpired in the EPRDF's Ethiopia was that the government and its bureaucracy's administrative efforts across many issues faced the constant threat of their works and decisions being overridden by the party structure.

One important feature in the evolution of the bureaucracy under the EPRDF-led regime was that the party in power introduced a series of civil service reforms and capacity-building programmes across a range of departments and issue areas starting from the transitional period in post-1991 Ethiopia (Watson & Yohannes 2005; Mengistu & Vogel 2006). The very objective of these civil service reform strategies was to make sure that professionals across all levels of the bureaucracy were well acquainted with the ruling coalition's political and economic programmes. Thus, baptizing any new recruits joining the bureaucracy with the party's expectations was one of the most important priorities in the civil service reform packages. A former state auditor in the Southern Nations, Nationalities and People's Region, an individual who attended a series of training sessions for the regime's above-mentioned goals, explained that those who oversaw the training programmes not only were members of the EPRDF coalition's constituent parties but also urged every trainee at the start of the sessions to also register for party membership. In facilitating such a mechanism, the instructors first identified who came from which regional state and divided all the recruits along ethnic lines. Once the ethnic sorting had been achieved, and everyone had become a member of one of the parties from within the coalition's parties – formed, of course, along ethnic lines – the first phase of the training started by focusing on how the previous political regimes used the bureaucracy and limited its growth by taking over its whole purpose for the strict implementation of their regimes' political agenda. The irony, according to the interviewee, was that,

after the instructors exhausted the trainees with what they refer as “the awful past” history of the civil service, which is essentially the bureaucracy, they commence to familiarize all of us with what EPRDF would do differently, which was basically nothing unique to appreciate, but to indoctrinate us with EPRDF's political programmes, such as the revolutionary democracy ideology.¹⁷

As stated earlier, the EPRDF's plans from the start were focused on the need to re-establish a bureaucratic system subservient to the coalition's agenda. In doing so, the training system made sure that the professionals in charge of a wide spectrum of departments were well aware of the ruling coalition's agenda and went away with methods they could use to effectively

implement such party programmes at the lower levels of bureaucracy across all levels of governmental structure. According to discussions with this interviewee, the establishment of this bureaucratic setting was also structured in a way that aligned with the party's line of hierarchical structure. The trainees were told that the main purpose of the training programmes, as corroborated by propaganda pieces in the training manuals, was to point out the EPRDF's commitment to empowering ethnic groups and promoting group rights by utilizing the bureaucratic framework. It is evident, however, that what mattered most in terms of aligning the bureaucratic setting with the party structure was the survival strategy of the coalition. As such, professionals within the bureaucracy in both the federal and regional settings, just like the political operation of the EPRDF, were recruited and trained along ethnic lines. In showing how the ruling coalition politicized and ethnicized the bureaucratic apparatus, Leonardo Arriola and Terrence Lyons argue,

Not only has the EPRDF provided opportunities for the country's various ethnic communities in national power structures, but it has also granted them a degree of autonomy. Although the constituent and affiliated parties that govern the regional states still rely on the center for resources and security, they also control their own substantial bureaucracies and budgets. It is not the EPRDF as a national coalition that controls the regional institutions and resources, but rather its constituent and affiliated ethnically defined parties. The regional states are more than mere conveyor belts that transmit the wishes of the center; they have well-developed political infrastructures and are the day-to-day face of the state for most rural Ethiopians.

(Arriola & Lyons 2016: 77)

Although the authors' acknowledgement of the EPRDF's goal of enriching diverse ethnic groups' opportunities in participating in the management of the bureaucracies in their respective regions and districts is certainly the reality of the EPRDF's goals and thus not a problem in its own right, a few points can still be made. First, the process by which the bureaucracy was organized from the recruitment process to the point it became operational shows that the ruling coalition was successfully achieving the creation of new patrons for the purposes of the coalition's intent to rule for a long time. Moreover, the notion that the bureaucracy was also designed to carry the promotion of group rights as its main purpose also poses the same challenges that were presented in discussing the federal settings across the so-called "developing" regions and the larger regions in general. In these regions, ethnic minorities and individuals were left exposed to various types of oppressive policies and actions by the regional and lower-level elites, whose actions were not checked by the ruling party coalition at the centre. Arriola and Lyons (2016) identify the chains in the regime's management of the bureaucracy, corroborating what I was also able to learn throughout my fieldwork.¹⁸

The pattern of interaction and co-optation therefore is as follows. The federal government and the EPRDF “party” structure directly controlled the federal bureaucracy and its party members within the structure, which then directly controlled the regional state bureaucracy and its party member administrators. Regional bureaucracy and party members then directly controlled the bureaucracy at the levels of zonal, woreda (district), and kebele (township) administrations. Finally, administrators of small local government levels then directly controlled individual-citizen-level activities via one-to-five (in Amharic, *anid le'amist*) spying and informing arrangements.¹⁹

From the fieldwork in preparation for this book, one interesting encounter was with an individual who was once a government deputy minister and a policy researcher at the EPRDF's headquarters in Addis Ababa. The interviewee explained that, in the policy implementation process, after the series of civil service reform programmes and capacity-building training sessions – which were always continuing periodically, given that the party's stance was continually evolving – the ruling party's ambitions to reform the bureaucracy at all levels by empowering ethnic group representatives at different levels of the federal bureaucratic setting backfired immediately against, among other things, the scheme to democratize the bureaucracy. The individual added that

the first thing that happened was that the newly appointed department directors and individuals within select federal bureaucratic institutions signed on the government's unpublished plan on the terminations of professionals for reasons such as declining party membership requested by the institutions they work for, as they now would be considered anti-EPRDF development strategies and anti-reform. And that continued to happen every time they voiced concerns on certain policy matters. And mostly also for being “suspected” as former regime remnants.²⁰

It is important to note that this is mostly relevant to explaining how the professional bureaucracy that joins the government workforce on an expertise basis is co-opted by the EPRDF's centralist party structure. But, when it comes to looking at more political offices across all levels of the federal setting that had to be filled with elected candidates, via periodic national elections, the EPRDF coalition member parties and its affiliate parties in the so-called “developing” regions had the flexibility to design certain institutions and their workforce. Such unparalleled levels of influence and capacity to keep their dominance over these offices reflected the leverage they enjoyed from the design of the bureaucracy's structure, which was manipulated and co-opted. As a result, what should have existed as a line separating the party structure from the government's bureaucracy was, in the case of Ethiopia, non-existent or blurred (Lee 1999).²¹

Moreover, it is also important to note that the problems within the state bureaucracy and the mechanisms employed by the ruling coalition are found to have been exemplified across all ministerial departments, government

commissions, bureaucratic authorities, and directorates. It is even the case that the legal bureaucracy and how the court system operated in Ethiopia is also not immune from the civil service reforms and capacity-building training sessions, as is clear from the information I collected in my fieldwork. For someone to work as a judge, as a government prosecutor in the legal bureaucracy, party membership was the foremost criterion. Thus, such realities reinforce the fact that the legal bureaucracy's mode of operation also depended on the EPRDF party structure's blessings.

A former lawyer and an individual who had undertaken most of the training to assume a judgeship role in the Amhara regional state was one of the interviewees who shared their experiences. Through our email exchanges, the interviewee explained his experiences in a detailed manner:

I graduated with an LLB law degree. However, it became very difficult to get a job, due to the fact that I was not a member of the ruling party. After enormous effort and help from someone within the government's Ministry of Justice, I received the opportunity to join the Amhara Region Justice Reform Program as candidate judge in 2010. During the judicial training, the officers and tutors of the training began to recruit candidates for the ruling party membership. I believed that such a move was unconstitutional, since a judge should not be a member of any political party and due to the cardinal principle of impartiality. I immediately rejected the request, citing the relevant provisions of the law, and began to be outspoken about the issue. Most of the candidates, although they visibly feared the government, eventually began to support my objection. Eventually, we decided to collectively urge the tutors and officers of the training center about the illegal nature of recruiting candidate judges for political party membership. On the other hand, the judicial training was conducted under the direction of the Justice Bureau. However, I disagreed with trainers by stating that the Justice Department is an executive organ of the government, and that it is not the appropriate organ to overlook prospective judges' training. My argument was that the appropriate organ to follow up the training was the Supreme Court of the country itself, or at least the regional supreme court in the Amhara regional state. We asked the immediate officials of the training center to give a response to our legitimate demand. But they failed to do so. Finally, I organized a committee to make a peaceful demonstration. Once we had our committee organized, we went to the streets of Bahir Dar City and in front of government institutions to protest and express our concern. Hours in advance, I informed one of the then widely circulated newspapers, *Awramba Times*, about the demonstration and its purpose. After we walked a mile away from our training center, however, a truck loaded with tens of security police officers arrived and started to beat us and fire tear gas towards us even though we did not demonstrate our cause in any violent way. Our crowd then was violently dispersed. On the next

day, the newspaper made the demonstration and its cause as a front-page cover. What then followed was that all my three friends and myself would be arrested on our way to flee the country, fearing brutal arrest and persecution. Unfortunately, they detained us in a border town called Humera [an Ethiopian town near the border to Sudan] for two days and took us to Axum detention center, located in the Tigray regional state. During our stay in Axum, I was interrogated, harassed, and beaten by multiple security personnel numerous times. After four days of stay in the Axum detention center, they moved all the prisoners including me to the capital city, Addis Ababa. When we arrived in Addis Ababa, however, security officers separated me from my training colleagues, blindfolded me and took me to a place which I do not have any idea of its location until today. Keep in mind that all of this happened because we demonstrated mainly against ideas requiring judges to accept party membership requests and for our call of ensuring judicial independence.²²

The above information, wide-ranging and taken directly from an email exchange with the individual, speaks volumes about the nature of the EPRDF ruling coalition's strict party structure, which proliferated at all levels of the bureaucracy, including the institutions designed to serve the demands of justice. The legal-rational system of the bureaucracy, dominated by the party structure as manifested through the EPRDF leadership's strategic interests, also shows that disagreeing to be patrons to the party leaders and their survivalist and undemocratic visions on the bureaucracies' functions could even be punishable by arbitrary imprisonment, torture, and other forms of human rights violations. Thus, we can say that the legal-rational basis of the bureaucracy was non-existent under the EPRDF's decades-long authoritarian rule.

Note that, in Part 1 of this project, the emphasis is on the persistence of the political culture in the Ethiopian state, in terms of the modes of elite interaction and operational relations and its impact on democratic development and/or the elites' propensity to adopt survivalist strategies. Indeed, we can see that the patrimonial nature of the first few political regimes in the modern political history of the country gave way to the emergence of a neo-patrimonial regime type. Such a neo-patrimonial clientelist regime, as is also evident in most of the EPRDF's tenure, effectively utilized the regimes' political elites' and the dominant-party structure's co-opting mechanisms to subdue the country's bureaucracy as one of the ways of succeeding in its political survival strategies. As the definition of neo-patrimonial clientelism indicates, looking at the bureaucratic setting separately from the political setting, given the blurred nature of the relationship in this type of regime, is difficult.

The post-1991 emergence of this type of bureaucracy and the co-optation mechanisms employed in submitting the said institutions at all levels to the party's agenda follow the path-dependent scenario both of the continuity in the political culture of the country and of the elites' implementation of

survivalist approaches to politics. Hence, it is vital to reiterate that such survivalist approaches show the ruling elites' mastery of the technicalities required to dominate and win over the institutional frameworks all at once. Moreover, such approaches clearly indicate that, despite the TPLF-dominated EPRDF's elites' admission of the need for democratic development, they were fully aware that attempting to open up the political space would not only leave them politically vulnerable but could also end the coalition's stability at the core. Jean-Nicolas Bach (2011) fully captures the ways that the EPRDF exploited and manipulated the state for its survivalist programmes and how the coalition's perception of democracy seemed to be practised. He states,

The EPRDF has clearly chosen and maintained a democratization from above. The state, not distinguished from the ruling party (EPRDF) nor from the government, creates organizations, leaders, and vanguard elites who all spread and impose the party's ideology. EPRDF's top-down policy is presented to both domestic and international audiences as democratic and revolutionary. In order to publicize its democratic credentials and achievements, the EPRDF has to educate people through the intermediary of its own elites who are at the same time party members. In this configuration, the public administration has little independence, nor have the civil servants. The latter are regularly required to attend lengthy meetings in the federated regions, in which the party "educates" them about issues such as "globalization" or "development", which have a touch of indoctrination.

(Bach 2011: 648)

Bach's argument fits with what was mentioned earlier with regard to the emergence of party centralism crippling the federal arrangement, the way the government bureaucracy operated, and how such a reality negatively impacted the autonomy of the regional states in general. In addition, the argument also concurs with the overall explanation of the EPRDF's model of authoritarian survival strategies. In summary, our understanding of the political discourse in the Ethiopian state, old or new, will only be better served by analysis using three lenses, namely cultural, institutional, and via the strategic interests of the political elite, which remained focused on cementing their rule by the very co-optation mechanisms they employed through the institutional settings they devised. Furthermore, given what is evident thus far from the discussions of the secondary literature and from the interviews I conducted throughout my fieldwork, it is very clear that the lines that distinguish the bureaucracy from the party structure in Ethiopia's federal setting were non-existent. Thus, from the patronage system exhibited within the bureaucracy vis-à-vis the coalition's centralist structure, we can conclude that the patron-client relationship detailed so far represents one of the mechanisms utilized by the EPRDF coalition to advance its survivalist agenda in an extraordinary fashion.

Conclusion

This chapter has made the answer to the question as to who leads and who controls every aspect of politics in the contemporary Ethiopian state clear. It has also shown that the EPRDF coalition was fully in charge of the state. In this regard, the ways the federal and regional constitutions were devised, and the observations of deep problems in terms of interpretation of the laws of the land, indicate that everything was accomplished in line with the coalition's design.

Of course, constitutions are there to be amended, changed, and/or reinforced in different ways. But the fact that the EPRDF leadership did not even agree with discussions of constitutional amendments unless the coalition needed them for its benefit also shows that they were, in fact, made to be the “eternal” rulebooks of the state – as long as the coalition remained in control of political power. This is so telling of the political leaders' interest in nothing but political survival, that they would exploit the federal arrangement for such a cause. The discussions show how the constitutional/institutional solutions demonstrably failed to achieve the very goals ascribed to them, which is, therefore, a testament to the argument presented here with regard to the EPRDF's politics of authoritarian survival.

Thus, the “successes” of the ethnic federal setting in post-1991 Ethiopia are, mostly, that it ensured the political elite's survival interests as they presided over the country's politics for some 28 years. Moreover, discussions of the failure of the group rights promotion agenda, as it curtailed minority and individual rights across the board, the mechanisms employed by the ruling coalition's leadership in its electoral manipulations of the elites at all levels of the federal bureaucracy, and the patron–client relations witnessed in the relations between the centre and the regional states as well as the bureaucracy, as co-opted by the EPRDF coalition's party structure, all point to what led to the success of these survivalist approaches by the political elite for almost three decades.

Moreover, the ethnic federal setting was in fact overshadowed by the centralist and strong party structure, which effectively stripped the regional states' elites of the autonomy of administering themselves across a spectrum of issues. It therefore remains essential for us to also look closely at how the TPLF-led EPRDF's leadership was able to survive the crucial challenges it faced throughout the evolution of post-1991 ethnic federal arrangement in the country.²³

Notes

- 1 Interviewee 1 is a former ranking member of OPDO, who currently lives in exile. The interview was conducted on May 8, 2017, in Atlanta, Georgia.
- 2 The NEBE was initially referred as an electoral board and then it was renamed as an electoral commission. Recently it has reclaimed its name as the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia.

- 3 The news item can be viewed at www.youtube.com/watch?v=O0f-658HYB4.
- 4 To see a video of the declaration of the state of emergency by the prime minister, watch www.youtube.com/watch?v=V_elADiMt_M.
- 5 To see Abay Tsehaye, who served as an advisor to the prime minister as well as minister of federal affairs, making such remarks, see www.youtube.com/watch?v=dJuQbLTAYw0.
- 6 Dr Yacob Haile Mariam, a famous international lawyer and United Nations and International Criminal Court prosecutor against the perpetrators of the Rwandan genocide, who was also one of Ethiopian opposition leaders in 2005 national elections, famously said: "It is very sad to label us, the opposition, 'Interahamwes' while they are very much aware that I was even one who was prosecuting those who committed the genocide in the aftermath of what happened in that country in the '90s."
- 7 The interview with interviewee 41 was conducted on July 2, 2017, in Amsterdam.
- 8 Abdi Iley, the former president of the Somali region, has been in prison since mid-2018, after he was accused of orchestrating a political move towards the secession of the region and due to gross violations of human rights in the region under his leadership.
- 9 The interview Abdullahi Hussen provided to Ethiopian Satellite Television, in Amharic, can be watched at www.youtube.com/watch?v=zeLINNwBE4Q.
- 10 The people of Ogaden are ethnic Somalis, and they have also raised arms against the regime.
- 11 The footage, filmed secretly and made public by Abdulahi Hussen after he left for exile, can also be watched on the same interview he provided to ESAT; see it from the 29:30 mark onwards at www.youtube.com/watch?v=zeLINNwBE4Q.
- 12 The interview with interviewee 28 took place on June 2, 2017, in Washington, DC.
- 13 See Akway (2015), a letter from the son of the jailed regional state president appealing to the American authorities to help free his father. He was freed from prison in 2018, along with massive numbers of political prisoners released after the political change that year.
- 14 The interview with interviewee 5 took place on February 21, 2017, in Washington, DC. A follow-up telephone interview was conducted on March 6, 2017.
- 15 The interviewee resides in Ethiopia but granted me the interview opportunity while on a work visit to Washington, DC, in April. The date will not be specified, as per the agreement with the interview participant.
- 16 The interview with interviewee 9 took place in Atlanta, Georgia, on April 15, 2017.
- 17 The interviews with interviewee 42 took place in Atlanta, Georgia, the first on March 15, 2017, the second a few days later, on March 18.
- 18 Terrence Lyons, Leonardo Arriola, Seife Ayalew, and Josef Woldense's (2016) work entitled "The Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front: authoritarian resilience and intra-party dynamics" is not published yet. I would like to thank Professor Terrence Lyons for sharing their work with me and permitting me to use it for this book.
- 19 The term "party members" refers to individual citizens who might be working for the government bureaucracy or political parties, or even businesspeople and farmers who were members of one of the political organizations making up the EPRDF coalition or its affiliate parties in so-called "developing" regions. "*Anid le'amist*" is an Amharic phrase meaning that one individual member of the ruling coalition would be tasked to spy and report on five or so civilians, whether

they themselves were party members or not. This created a huge challenge for the general public, as no one could now trust anyone, even in simple political conversations.

- 20 The interview with interviewee 36 was conducted in Silver Spring, Maryland, on May 25, 2017.
- 21 In his study of the bureaucracy and decentralization policies of the Ethiopian regime at woreda (district) level, Jin-Sang Lee mentions the challenges he faced, saying: "The main problem noted here is the blurring of lines between elected and appointed personnel. At the woreda level, those who run sector offices are both elected and appointed officials" (Lee 1999: 8).
- 22 The extended discussion with interviewee 47 took place via multiple interactions over the telephone and using email between April 26 and May 7, 2017. I would like to thank the individual for emailing me the quoted explanation about the state of the legal bureaucracy in present-day Ethiopia based on his personal experience.
- 23 In Chapter 9, I discuss such critical junctures in the life of the EPRDF coalition, and Chapter 10 discusses the demise of the TPLF-led EPRDF and the emergence of the Prosperity Party under the leadership of the current prime minister, Abiy Ahmed, since early 2018. Today the EPRDF is dissolved and the PP is the new incumbent.

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8 **The EPRDF, ethnic federalism, and the anatomy of a dominant-party state's economy**

Introduction

In the last few chapters, the complexities of Ethiopian politics, with ethnic federalism as the main frame of reference, have been discussed. As such, historical narratives, assessments of the recent past, and political actors who have presided over the country's politics at one time or another all indicate that most Ethiopian political regimes share many similarities. These political elites put the notion of political survival above and beyond the ideals of public service and political legacy. Here, it is also critical to note the similarities in any democratic or authoritarian settings where political elites' priorities and efforts are directed primarily at ensuring the longevity and viability of the political rule they hold. The difference between the two settings, however, is that the political elites' efforts in democratic states focus mostly on appealing to their political base – i.e., in large part to their constituents, and to some extent the party hierarchy or the establishment. In contrast, those in authoritarian countries for the most part focus on appeasing the party bosses and the party machine. By doing so, they strengthen the party's control of the government institutions, which, in turn, control the populace. Therefore, on the question of the Ethiopian political elite, it seems a fact that, no matter how much they achieved in their introduction of economic development programmes, their tenacious efforts and the mechanisms employed in the quest to prolong their political reign stand out more than their accomplishments in delivering important public goods and services.

In this respect, the study of Ethiopia's authoritarian regimes, both in the past and, with the EPRDF, until recently, invites a careful understanding of ruling elites' political as well as economic programmes. Identifying the successes as well as failures of such programmes and comprehending the "Why?" and "How?" of their policies is crucial. Thus, in broader terms, from the outset I have attempted to explain the patrimonial and neo-patrimonial past, the clientelist EPRDF, and the persistent nature of the political culture in terms of the patterns of elite interaction. I have also extensively addressed how the ethnic federal setting as an institutional solution helped the TPLF-led EPRDF regime in its survivalist ambitions given that the mechanisms

for elite co-optation were made easier under such a tightly controlled federal arrangement.

Moreover, this work has demonstrated that Ethiopia's political elites, in old or contemporary times, are rational actors who focus on maximizing their strategic interests, via their efforts and their effective control of the state and its resources, towards defeating the challenges that they come up against through political fortune. In the last few substantive chapters, for instance, the "Why?" of ethnic federalism, from the individual versus group rights perspective, is presented and explained, along with the "How?" of its implementation in terms of electoral politics, minority rights protection, the absence of genuinely balanced relations between the regional states and the central government, and the creation of a patron bureaucracy to the centralist party structure.

Furthermore, it is also important to recall that the emergence of new and testing challenges, from the issue of questions of identity to popular demands for political and economic equality, forced the TPLF-led EPRDF elite to vie for new approaches to ensure the continuity and survival of their political reign. One major aspect was the economic sphere, and how the EPRDF reshaped its economic agenda from time to time. Hence, this chapter first presents how the group economic rights promotion agenda was also crafted in post-1991 Ethiopia along the lines of the introduction of ethnic federalism, so as to achieve considerable levels of reduction in economic inequality, in comparison with what was assumed to have been failure in this respect by past regimes.

Note that the discussion in the development of such economic programmes, and the EPRDF's efforts in this regard, did not happen in reaction to recent political developments that are cited as new challenges – because they were there from the beginning of the post-1991 political era. Nevertheless, the fact that the ruling coalition's hold on the economic sphere was even stronger than it was with the political sphere influenced the tactically gifted EPRDF leaders to put more emphasis on strengthening the coalition's grip on the economy, as further reinforcement to their political dominance. In doing so, this chapter focuses on the EPRDF's land policy and agricultural economic programmes, as well as the ruling coalition's evolving ideological foundations, by categorizing them into two time frames: the first and second decades.¹ Here, it presents the successes as well as the ambiguities in the economic approaches the regime relied on in attempting to meet its predetermined goals by discussing the literary foundations for the economic ideologies that the EPRDF picked up on in its time as a ruling coalition – i.e., the revolutionary democracy political and economic paradigm and the developmental state economic growth and development strategy, which were put into practice in line with the time frames mentioned.

Second, Chapter 8 also presents how the ruling coalition's centralist party structure across all levels of government was also in control of the economic sphere, as the EPRDF's constituent parties were the most important economic

actors and their elites were the nation's economic bosses. In this regard, I look at the ever-growing endowments that the EPRDF member parties established, and how they transformed the ruling elites into leading economic forces in the country while, again, effectively transforming those same political parties into the economic bosses of the country's vital economic engines.

In the post-2018 political change in Ethiopia, the fate of the party endowments has changed, as all of them have now been transferred from the party to the regional governments. Most of the discussion still focuses on the era prior to the political change, however. Moreover, throughout the discussion, it will also be evident that the illiberal economic approaches, essentially, kept the country in the state of a mixed economy but left the TPLF-led EPRDF ruling coalition in command of the state enterprises, mostly considered cash cows serving the survivalist ambitions of those in power. The state enterprises were actually controlled by the EPRDF coalition's party structure, while each member party of this coalition was also overseeing the management of party-led endowments. In this regard, the chapter further elucidates the "lost accountability" in the management of all economic institutions. Moreover, in explaining the anatomy of Ethiopia's political economy from various perspectives and time frames, further analyses of the economic paradigms and programmes and how they practically played out in the ethnic federal setting are detailed.

In this regard, by the end of the chapter, it can be seen how the rational ruling elites, as shaped by the continuous authoritarian political culture and the absence of the necessary institutional strength, designed and implemented economic solutions that further secured their survivalist political interests. Here, it is also important to note that, despite the fact that the book focuses on contributing to the literature on authoritarian survival in general, it will also pay attention to the successes of some of the policies implemented in Ethiopia's economy in the post-1991 political era, regardless, of course, of their far-reaching limitations. In achieving such objectives in the chapter, methodologically, the book relies on analysis of the critical events that transformed federal Ethiopia's economy over these 28 years, for better or worse, according to the time frames outlined at the start of the book. The interview data collected from my fieldwork, through interviewing policy makers, bureaucrats, and party officials, to entrepreneurs and business owners, will be also presented. Moreover, secondary resources that help explain the Ethiopian phenomenon and support or oppose the primary data collected will be compared and contrasted as well.

Ideological foundations of the TPLF/EPRDF economy: the literature

In this section, two ideological beliefs that the EPRDF ruling coalition utilized across almost every aspect of its political and economic programmes until early 2018 – revolutionary democracy and the developmental state

model for economic growth and strategy – are discussed. Whereas the revolutionary democracy ideology was the song of the regime in every aspect of the political and economic programmes it envisaged and implemented in much of the first half of its rule, the developmental state economic paradigm came to the Ethiopian political scene with the advent of the new millennium and remained as the main ideological basis of the regime until 2018, which at times changed the meaning of what “developmental state” means to its liking, as we can see later in this chapter. One central question of course remains: not only what such ideological beliefs are all about, but how they differ from one another.

Revolutionary (*abyotawi*) democracy as an economic paradigm in the EPRDF’s first decade

The TPLF, which orchestrated the formation of the EPRDF coalition and stayed as the most dominant of the coalition’s member parties until 2018, is also credited with the adaptation and implementation of its economic ideologies. For the purposes of this work, I will not dwell on the literature on revolutionary democracy in detail. It is critical, however, to lay out how the TPLF and then the EPRDF came to use it as their first major ideological foundation to their political reign. The revolutionary democracy ideology – essentially, a leftist ideological framework of governance – was not picked by accident. The TPLF was, all along, a leftist movement. One of the TPLF’s founders, Aregawi Berhe, who was in exile until 2018, explains in his work focusing on the TPLF as a political movement:

Initially, the TPLF considered itself an organization within the broad spectrum of Marxist movements of the Ethiopian left. With the rapidly growing number of peasant and nationalist members in the Front in the late 1970s, the left-wing elements saw the need to organize themselves to lead the Front in the direction they believed would realize the interests of the “poor and exploited masses”, and in which the right to self-determination of Tigrayans would be respected. At the beginning of 1978, a Marxist-Leninist group was uniting around this notion within the TPLF – as a network of revolutionary fighters who believed in socialism as a just and fair system for all.

(Berhe 2009: 208)

Of course, no more credible source could be available than the founder of the TPLF movement himself. And, according to Berhe’s assessment of the ideological foundation of the TPLF, the TPLF indeed organized itself as a leftist rebellion that waged an armed struggle against a leftist regime – i.e., the military socialist regime. In fact, the considerations that the TPLF leadership used as a basis to join new political partnerships in the struggle against the military regime were also based on whether these groups had embraced

similar leftist ideologies in addition to their commitment to overthrowing the regime that had been in place for much of the 1970s and 1980s. What is also vital to discuss is that the mentions of peasants, and the “poor and exploited masses”, in the above quote stressed the adoption of a revolutionary democracy ideology, which is a by-product of the socialist eastern camp’s left-wing ideologies. According to a former bureaucrat who had served the regime from the beginning, the term “revolutionary” symbolized the EPRDF’s commitment to group rights and the term “democracy” its commitment to embark on democratic reforms by promoting the group rights agenda. In this regard, “achieving both”, according to him, was possible through institutionalizing the state in a new federal setting that could go on to guarantee equal distribution of wealth while empowering the regional states to implement such centrally driven economic strategies in a way benefiting the economic groups residing within their respective states.²

Notwithstanding the explanation of this interviewee on what revolutionary democracy was meant to deliver, it is useful to look at the broader and seminal contribution by Jean-Nicolas Bach (2011), who not only helps with a brief description of the meaning of the concept but also analyses it from the perspective of the terms use by the TPLF and then the EPRDF. According to Bach, revolutionary democracy actually means more than that. He argues,

The democratic project through revolution partly emerged from a Leninist interpretation of Marx’s Proletariat Dictatorship thesis. The notion of revolutionary democracy came from an opposition to capitalist liberal ideology, and Lenin’s revolutionary project. Quite demarcating himself from his Marxian heritage and inspired by the writings of the utopian socialist Tchernychevski, Lenin stressed the necessity for the “enlightened” elites to lead the unconscious masses to the revolution. Lenin’s revolutionary strategy and goals were mainly presented in his famous *What Is to Be Done?* and at the occasion of the First Communist International in March 1919. “Proletariat dictatorship” was considered the antithesis of “parliamentary bourgeois democracy” and the social revolution was expected to be led by a vanguard party in a “democratic centralism” that would not allow any internal factionalism. Thus, revolutionary democracy has been interpreted as a bridge between pre-capitalist and socialist societies.

(Bach 2011: 641)

Obviously, as this quote eloquently puts it, Ethiopia’s societies that the liberation fronts, including the TPLF and its partners, were attempting to liberate could be described as “pre-capitalist” and socialist societies. For one, in the economic systems from modern Ethiopian times to recent days, the free-market economy was either non-existent or limited to a great degree by government policies in previous regimes, as well as by the EPRDF itself. And for the rest, of course, it is clear that, for most of the 17 years or so that the rebel

groups were fighting the military socialist regime, the economic system was constructed along the same leftist anti-liberal economic principles that were attributed to the socialist regime's deep ties with the former Soviet Union and its ideological partners. Hence, for the TPLF, adopting and understanding these ideological foundations in guiding its political and economic principles were important, as what it aspired to through such revolutionary struggle was to realize its claims of freeing the exploited masses that suffered under the lingering economic and political inequality from previous political regimes.

The TPLF kept this leftist political and economic ideology throughout the period of struggle and after it had assumed political power with its formation of the EPRDF coalition in post-1991 Ethiopia. The ideology was not kept as it was by the TPLF, however, as various changes were regularly being introduced by its ideologues throughout. In indicating some of the fundamental changes, Jan-Nicolas Bach adds:

In its 1976 Manifesto, the movement initially called for the independence of Tigray, thus defending Tigrayan nationalism on the basis of the national oppression thesis. In the course of the 1970s, the TPLF progressively adopted a broader Ethiopian agenda in which Tigray would gain autonomy. Under the influence of the Tigrayan intellectuals and their Marxist-Leninist inclination, one can consider the TPLF was as an NDR movement in the 1970s, i.e., at the time of the Manifesto. However, during the struggle, facing the necessity to adapt its strategy in a rural Tigray environment and following the USSR's friendship with the Dergue regime, the TPLF adopted the Maoist model, thus entering the RPDR (or New Democratic Revolution) at the end of the 1970s. In the 1980s, the tactical alliance between Maoism and bourgeoisie was rejected by TPLF thinkers, who eventually shifted to the Albanian model, which appeared less "revisionist" to them.

(Bach 2011: 642)³

Furthermore, Bach also explains the ideological changes and readaptation of Marxist-Leninist beliefs in the TPLF camp, through the establishment of the Marxist-Leninist League of Tigray, which he describes as "a party within a party" (Bach 2011: 642). Nevertheless, with sweeping changes in the international climate following the fall of the Soviet Union, the spread of a more liberal economic agenda in most ex-Soviet states, and the fall of the Dergue, which put the TPLF at the helm of political power in Ethiopia, other changes had to happen in an attempt to appease donor countries and show the TPLF's commitment to political and economic reforms. Hence, semi-liberal free market policies would be introduced, and the private sector would be encouraged with the establishment of a first-of-its-kind agency to facilitate the process of privatization in the country (Bach 2011).

The TPLF tenaciously keep its revolutionary (*abyotawi*, in Amharic) democracy ideology intact, however, even amid the introduction of some

liberal economic policies. The late Ethiopian prime minister, Meles Zenawi, who asserted this ideology's importance in helping the country's future, claimed such an economic and political ideology "had to be firmly grasped if Ethiopia was to embark on sustainable economic development", which Bach quotes, and then further states that, "despite the adoption of a multi-party system and liberal economic policies, Meles Zenawi paradoxically reaffirmed the ideological line rejecting parliamentary democracy and defending democratic centralism based on a vanguard party" (Bach 2011: 643). Indeed, in revolutionary democracy, the TPLF-led EPRDF leaders saw their only option for transforming the Ethiopian state in terms of promotion of the group rights agenda, which was the vision they had for the establishment of a strong centralist party structure and the realization of their political survival.

Explaining how the ethnic federal agenda could also be presented according to this revolutionary democracy ideology is essential. Obviously, economic reforms through the revolutionary democracy framework had to occur throughout the newly constituted members of the federation. Among the first questions, for instance, were how state revenues were to be collected and shared. According to Edmond Keller (2002), the regime, in its attempt to satisfy donor countries and international organizations, echoed the regional states' autonomy in economic management, which, according to the author, the World Bank had acknowledged in its 2000 report by stating,

Ethiopia has embarked on a bold and thoughtful process of decentralization, which has been supported by a widely shared consensus over both the development strategy and objectives, and very large transfers of untied resources from the federal government to the regions. At this point, the system is unquestionably working well.

(World Bank 2000: 1)

Here, it is important to note that Keller does not mention the revolutionary democracy economic paradigm *per se*. Nonetheless, given that these economic policies, which range from revenue sharing to other economic notions and strategies, were designed according to such a paradigm, inferring such a concept would not be an understatement. Keller effectively counters the World Bank's report, however, by arguing:

By the standards of public administration, this would seem to be the case. However, there is a political dimension that organizations like the World Bank and other international development agencies seem to ignore or simply downplay. Ethnic federalism has not resulted in a widespread consensus in the general population of Ethiopia. There are some in the public at large, particularly among the Amhara and other Amharized ethnicities, who contend that by definition a development strategy involving ethnic federalism is fatally flawed.⁴ [...] Despite such concerns,

the EPRDF government has forged ahead with its plans, justifying this approach based on the fact that its first priority is the removal of social inequalities based on ethnicity.

(Keller 2002: 22)

Keller's explanation serves two important purposes for the discussions in this chapter. First, it shows that the ruling coalition's liberalization of the economy, although it did occur to some degree, was mostly carried out for the goal of appeasing donor countries and organizations. Second, it also shows that the ideals of revolutionary democracy, with the EPRDF's intentions of promoting the group rights agenda, was fully implemented, as we saw in much of its political agenda displayed in the ethnic federal arrangement, which is in reaction to what the TPLF-led EPRDF presumed a reaction to the policies implemented previously by the historically dominant Amhara elites. Nevertheless, the main point in the discussion of what the concept of revolutionary democracy is about and how it evolved within the TPLF and then the TPLF-led EPRDF coalition is to show that such an economic paradigm was the main ideological foundation that guided the economy of the new, post-1991 Ethiopia. That continued until the revolutionary democracy paradigm was replaced with the developmental state economic paradigm at the turn of the century.

The developmental state economic paradigm: the second decade in the EPRDF's economy

Chalmers Johnson (1982), who studied the rapid economic growth of Japan in the post-war era by focusing on the performance of the Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI), was one of the first to use the concept of the developmental state. Johnson argues that the term represents the extraordinary economic success that the Japanese state apparatus helped create for a long time. The Japanese experience then becomes an example of economic success and would be copied by many south-east Asian states, which led to the eventual association of the theory of developmental state with that region's economic transformation. According to Johnson, the generally accepted characters of a developmental state were demonstrated by Japan's efforts to set consistent economic priorities, its focus on prioritizing economic development, its government's heavy intervention in the economy, its extensive consideration of the developmental state economic thesis as its foundation for growth, and its effectiveness in establishing a functioning bureaucracy and the kind of institutions, or model institutions, that it set up (such as MITI).

Beyond Johnson's explanations of what the theory entails on the basis of Japan's historical past, Peter Evans argues that "only when embeddedness and autonomy are joined together can a state be called developmental" (Evans 1995: 12). According to Evans, "embedded autonomy" is what offers

the fundamental basis for effective intervention in the economy for a state that aspires to implement rapid industrialization. Furthermore, Evans also argues that the developmental state and its prime example, Japan, fit the “Weberian hypothesis”, which points to the need for a strong state apparatus as crucial to the creation of an effective bureaucracy (Evans 1995: 48). Assuming the south-east Asian success in rapid economic growth and development was achieved by the developmental state economic model, the question becomes how other states might also adopt such a growth strategy to emulate the success stories from Asia. In this regard, in a seminal work, Atul Kohli (2004) also argues that those most effective developmental states’ characteristics existed for a long time before the states even adopted this state-centric economic model. According to Kohli, the history of the state (for instance, even the form of colonial history preceding the state’s independence), the state’s bureaucratic strength, the state’s ability to levy taxes and spend the collected tax in public development programmes, and the state’s ability to create a “disciplined labour force” were all key to the achievement of success (Kohli 2004: 10).

Kohli, who discusses the various types of developmental states at length, also argues that the level of success the developmental states achieved in their industrialization programmes had its costs. In his discussion of South Korea’s economic success, for instance, he argues:

The successes, however, came at a high cost. Rapid industrialization occurred within the framework of a highly authoritarian state characterized by overtones of fascism, a state that I have labeled cohesive capitalist. Political dissent was not tolerated. Many opposing the regime were repressed, and labor was corporatized, and state controlled. Income, wealth, and power inequalities in the society also became more skewed, especially starting in the 1970s, as the government deliberately encouraged economic concentration in the hands of the big chaebols.

(Kohli 2004: 122)⁵

As can be seen from Kohli’s argument, despite unleashing changes in the lives of the citizens of a developmental state and achieving unprecedented economic growth, this model did not encourage democratization from the start, at least in the case of South Korea. Here, Kohli’s argument also begs questions, such as whether one could argue that the developmental state economic model is compatible with democracy (even though the EPRDF champions it only in name) or it is just that it is incompatible, and simply helps the survivalist ambitions of ruling elites – as we have seen with the EPRDF’s mechanisms of manipulating institutional solutions devised for the sake of its survival.

Certainly, according to Johnson (1982), the claims that connect developmental states with authoritarian forms of government are not valid. Johnson also stresses, however, that “authoritarianism can sometimes inadvertently solve the main political problem of economic development using important players in the economy such as some market-forces’ efforts in mobilizing the

overwhelming majority of the population to work and sacrifice for developmental projects” (Johnson 1982: 52). For Johnson, therefore, what matters most for a developmental state’s government is a level of legitimacy from the masses and its approval of development projects.

Here, we can see that in both the revolutionary democratic economic paradigm’s implementation process and the adaptation and realization of the developmental state model, the EPRDF coalition did in fact successfully manage to use its heavy-handed interventions in the economy, via state-sponsored economic programmes (especially in the area of infrastructure development), to seek and gain some levels of political legitimacy. Nevertheless, although infrastructure development as a strategy to gain legitimacy could be one example, in the case of Ethiopia’s regime throughout the 1990s and until 2018, the problem is that Johnson does not explicitly indicate the further techniques the state could utilize for the purpose of achieving legitimacy from the public, as the factors for gaining such legitimacy could be much broader than that. Hence, Johnson’s claims can also be contradictory with each other, although his argument in terms of the role of market forces in such economic paradigms remains vital to explore. In fact, this chapter also pays considerable attention to what one could refer to as “market forces” in the case of Ethiopia, if party-owned businesses, party-led endowments, and state enterprises that directly report to party headquarters and bosses can be so classified.

As we can further see from Sung-Ju Han’s (1974) historical account of the period of high economic success in South Korea as an example, it is clear that the economic progress, sadly, was marred by high levels of state repression. For instance, Han explains more broadly how the South Korean state was oppressive amid its rapid economic transformations, mentioning the brutality of the police, who, at times, had similar levels of responsibility even to the bureaucracy. Similarly, Han records how useful it was for the country to use the security institutions of the state to repress the political opposition – a point it is important to note. Here again, in light of previous discussions about the existence of a patron bureaucracy and the domination by the TPLF/EPRDF government of the security apparatus, we can see that there are significant parallels to explore further.

Furthermore, in his assessment of the state-centric theories, Peter Hall explains that such theories prioritize the autonomy of the state more than societal interest (Hall 1986: 15). Consistent with Hall’s claim, Peter Evans also argues that, as was evident at least in the developmental state regime in South Korea during the presidency of Syngman Rhee, from 1948 to 1960, when the bureaucracy was highly repressed, promotions and dismissals within the civil service were entirely political and the state was highly clientelist, with “rent-seeking behavior rampant and systematic” (Evans 1995: 52). Of course, as we can learn from Evans’s implication in his explanation of “embedded autonomy”, the state in fact does acquire legitimacy, on the basis of some forms of interaction with its citizens that might not align with the generally

accepted expectations and principles of democracy. This, I believe, indicates that the coercive apparatus of the state can be essential to a regime's ambitions for success as a developmental state.

In the EPRDF's case, that would be attributable to its survivalist political and economic approaches. Hence, the autonomy that the state enjoys in its heavy-handed management of the economy might not be what its citizens were pledged or what they agreed to voluntarily but, rather, an imposed, party-centred economic agenda that aligns with the party's political interests for survival. In both Evans's and Johnson's descriptions of the developmental state paradigm, one might also see that a form of semi-authoritarian behaviour (or "soft" authoritarianism) could be tolerated as long as the state follows an active state-centric economic model.

Nevertheless, debates on the compatibility of a certain state's adoption of the developmental state theory as its guiding principle and the ideals of democracy have led to new attempts to make the connection between the two. For a regime such as the TPLF-led EPRDF's, despite the lack of clear commitment to democratization and its rampant authoritarian tendencies, keeping the term "democracy" as part of its ideological propaganda is very important as a further attempt to gain political legitimacy. This attempt, as described by Mark Robinson and Gordon White (1998), is what is referred to as a democratic developmental state. And this happens to be the case in what transpired in the TPLF-led EPRDF regime's use of the term, as can be seen across the party programmes and the ruling coalition's propaganda pieces, which mainly refer to its ideology as "democratic developmentalism".

In formal terms, the Ethiopian regime also debated and clarified the concept with regard to the labels it should utilize for such an economic model, from calling the model "developmental state" originally to claiming it later as "democratic developmental state". The late prime minister, Meles Zenawi, who was the chief ideologue in the importation, adaptation, and supervision of the country's transitions from a command economic model to a revolutionary democratic and semi-liberalist economic ideology and then to developmental state status, was aware of the unbearable cost that could come with the adoption of the south-east Asian model of developmental state. In what seemed an inspiration from such a concern, Zenawi argued for democratic developmentalism, stating that

development is a political process first and economic and social process later. It is the creation of a political set-up that is conducive to accelerated development that sets the ball of development rolling. Only when there is a state that has the characteristics of a developmental state can one meaningfully discuss the elimination of rent-seeking behavior. In its absence rent seeking will be rampant no matter what the size of the state might be. Only in the context of such a political environment can one debate about development policy in a meaningful manner. In its absence all government policy and action however limited and timid it might be will be

riddled with rent-seeking behavior, and this particularly so in developing countries as these countries will be coming out of a social and political environment where vertical, patron–client networks are pervasive.

(Zenawi 2006)

Zenawi's argument implies that economic policies cannot be disentangled from political concerns. Hence, in his subsequent arguments, he calls for a state that is committed to both the political and the economic concerns of society. Ironically, however, the prime minister's mentions of rent-seeking patterns and patron–client relations indicate that, although he well knows that the Ethiopian bureaucracy is effectively incorporated into his ruling coalition's highly centralized party structure across all levels of the federation, he advocates the "strong government actions and policy" that are crucial to the success of the country's developmental state characteristics, which indeed contradicts the developmental state's principles. But whether strong government means the empowering of the coercive powers of the state in the management of the economy could also be open to interpretation. It can be argued, however, that, given the involvement of the military in owning and establishing corporations in the country's growing economy at least in the last decade of EPRDF rule (until 2018), the prime minister and his ruling coalition bestowed an economic role on loyal military chiefs and commanders as a way of ensuring the success of the economic programme, on the one hand, and the ruling coalition's survivalist ambitions, on the other. Conversely, it is also important to note that the regime had also been using the concept of democratic developmentalism, though used in line with the developmental state economic paradigm, along the lines of revolutionary democratic economic plans.

All in all, Ethiopia's adoption of this economic model contributed to rapid economic growth, albeit with imperfections; and, indeed, it is essential to acknowledge that some economic progress was achieved. Despite the economic success in the last decade, however, the regime's "commitment" to democracy quickly dwindled to oblivion. In the same time frame (the second decade), when the EPRDF's democratic developmentalism was put into practice, the ruling coalition's hold on political power grew tremendously, to the extent of complete domination of parliament, gaining 100 per cent of the vote in 2010's national elections. Moreover, we have also seen from the literature on this form of economic model the role institutions play in realizing the potential of developmental paradigms. But this leads to the question in the case of Ethiopia: where were the institutions that were critically needed if the developmental state paradigm was to succeed? Of course, they were either non-existent or new and immature for handling the requirements and demands of the model or designed purely for political survival, as was evident with MetEC (Metals and Engineering Corporation, which was massively corrupt, and its military leaders are now in jail: see Hassan 2018; and Abebe 2018).

Interestingly, however, the role of the party endowments of the EPRDF, the coalition's heavy-handed role in the management of state economic enterprises, went on to become prevalent. Moreover, the growing role of the military in the economy, as indicated earlier, could eventually become one of the answers to our question "Where were such institutions?". These topics will therefore have to be addressed in more detail. In the next section, however, we see how the revolutionary democracy and developmental state paradigms played out via the economic policies of the regime in the first and second decades and assess their impact on the group rights promotion agenda of the ruling coalition in the country's new federal setting.

The EPRDF's economic policies and ethnic federalism in the first and second decades

Over the first decade of the EPRDF's economic policies the political elites' predetermined goal was focused on delivering the needed economic outcome that would change the lives of citizens. Hence, raising the level of economic equality was the primary issue and part and parcel of the group rights agenda, with an additional emphasis on ethnicity. Recall that the next episode in realizing such an agenda was to create the ethnic federal arrangement and ensure that the newly created regional states were central to the ruling coalition's vision for economic success. As indicated in the discussion of the TPLF's leftist past and its revolutionary democratic economic agenda, however, it is critical that we also discern the segments of Ethiopian society the regime targeted in order to help with the realization of its economic programmes. In this regard, the peasantry, and rural Ethiopia in general, would become the focus of the ruling coalition. Hence, the first of the major eye-opening laws would address the issue of land. Major economic policy directions would also focus on achieving an agriculture-led economy and ways of improving the peasantry's agricultural outputs, while working on making the lives of people in this sector better than before and ensuring the most important goal of achieving "food sufficiency", to help combat the recurrent famines that mostly impacted rural areas.

The first economic policy to be introduced in line with the revolutionary democratic paradigm was the agricultural development-led industrialization (ADLI) policy, which emerged after the unveiling of the transitional government in 1991. The EPRDF's party programme claimed that this policy was important

[t]o ensure that development is centered on the agricultural sector in recognition of the pivotal role of human capital in rapid and sustainable development, as most of the population is rural, and in further recognition of the fact that it is in agriculture that limited investment yields great returns in development. [...] To ensure rapid development through land-use policy whereby farmers have sufficient farming land and that

this resource would be put to optimal use with a view of protecting and preserving the environment.

(EPRDF 1991: 14)

And the ruling coalition's presentation of such views, which ultimately brought the introduction of its land and agricultural policy to fruition, seemed convincing even for those opposed to rural-centred programmes, who preferred instead opting for industrialization-focused economic programmes that could support both the agricultural sector and the growth of manufacturing. Regardless, these programmes ensued, and were put in place by erasing the military era's land policy, which many had considered an improvement over the imperial era's land-related policies, which had proclaimed land as the possession of the state, whereby the aristocracy had much say in its use and distribution. The military regime's efforts at land distribution and the easing of restrictions on land use as a response to the famed "Land to the tiller" slogan of the student movement, which helped oust the imperial regime, were given deserved credits.

In contrast, the EPRDF regime declared that land now would be renationalized (Harbeson 1998). The declaration, according to the EPRDF's claims, was to protect the peasantry, which the coalition considered unable to manage its properties – mainly land. The EPRDF even referred to farmers as too illiterate and too ill-trained for the land market, and thus the protection of this wealth had to be the ultimate responsibility of the government – and so the EPRDF's responsibility. Furthermore, according to the EPRDF, one way to protect farmers therefore would be to focus on improving the yields derived from smallholding agriculture, which is mostly the case in the country.⁶ Moreover, the ruling coalition also declared that land could not be sold or exchanged, except for minor exceptions. Indeed, as the former prime minister, Meles Zenawi, stated, whereas those in the north (referring to the Amhara) were owners of the land even though they were not allowed to sell or exchange it, those in the south would not be considered owners of the land even though they could retain it indefinitely.⁷

An economist by profession and a long-serving bureaucrat in Ethiopia's Ministry of Agriculture stated, however, that

the EPRDF and its leaders' intention from the beginning when it comes to the renationalization of land was mainly for the purpose of its political agenda of benefiting those ethnicities that they had considered the victims of the old land policies from previous regimes, which they considered had allegedly helped the Amhara farmers, although, sadly, that was not the case. Hence, for the EPRDF, land nationalization serves two important goals. One is that it helps the ruling coalition to reward its loyalists and patrons across the newly minted regional states that are formed along ethnic lines. Secondly, it effectively serves the purpose of punishing those

whom the regime thinks had benefited more during their ownership of land during the Dergue era.⁸

In fact, as this individual indicated, the regime first embarked upon the redistribution of land in the north, mainly in Amhara-populated rural areas, where first the land would be taken from a given household that had been considered wealthy by Ethiopia's rural standards, then its possessions would be distributed to another household that was considered to have owned less. According to an individual whose family relied on its farmlands:

My family, who had owned about 30 acres of farming land, were deprived of their possessions and left with only 12 acres, because they were fortunate since no members of the family were found to be a member of the Worker's Party of Ethiopia. However, those who were found to be former members of what EPRDF considered a former ruling class would be only left with four acres of land for being "old regime bureaucrats", a name that was given to those farmers who were perceived to support the old regime or had served in any capacity in one of those farmers' associations of old.⁹

Given what the personal accounts of a former EPRDF civil servant and an individual descended from a family of farmers entail, the ruling coalition had certainly used its land policy to create new winners and losers, which was the way the TPLF-led EPRDF operated in much of its political practice. Although the notion of empowering group rights was the basis for most of its agenda, the practicality of the policies and implementation strategies also largely aligned with the deception of the political elite, who used the institutions they had designed to create new patrons and supporters while punishing those whom they considered former and potential adversaries. The role of the ethnic federal arrangement and the co-opted elites was therefore immense. The issue of land management in urban centres after the promulgation of the decree that nationalized land was also no different from that of rural areas. In an email exchange with one of my respondents, the individual stated:

In one of the early days in October 1998, a government cadre, who was of Tigrayan origin, came to my textile shop in Merkato¹⁰ and asked me if I can sell one of the compartments in my store. I told the individual that I have never advertised to sell any part of my shop and would not consider to do so for any value. In the next week, three government officers came and put a "*tashigual*" [an Amharic word meaning "administratively closed"] sign on one of my shops. I immediately went to the municipality and asked for an explanation. But they were clueless, just as I was. After many trials in court, I was only scheduled to appeal after two years, and

in the meantime a section of my store would be occupied by someone who would start to wholesale the same products I was selling. I was hurt to the extreme and did not know what to do. Eventually, my scheduled date for court appearance arrived, and I was asked by the presiding judge how long I had owned or occupied the store. I replied stating that I owned and operated in the property for over 22 years and indicated that it was also owned by my father before that for a long time. The judge replied, “Well, if you had used the store for all this time, what would be the problem if others also try to use it for some years?” And the judge then decided that I would lose the battle before the “court” of law, and I was left crying for all these years since then.¹¹

As per this individual’s personal account, the ruling coalition even treated the buildings as possessions of their particular owners while the land the buildings were erected on was the government’s. In general, the implementation of such policies would have the far-reaching consequence of creating new winners and losers in the EPRDF era. The impact of these policies at the aggregate level of the economy also somewhat improved agricultural yields, however, though that would be no substitute for the suffering that was brought about as a result of the policies.

Here, it is important to note that the account above shows that the regime’s intention to promote group rights came at the cost of violations directed against individuals’ rights. Moreover, keeping in mind the notion of what strengthened the EPRDF’s chances of survival, the regime’s owning of the land provided a situation in which the political elite, who were at the top of party-owned businesses and on the boards of directors of state enterprises, had the comfort of using state-owned land for expanding such ventures to their liking. Nonetheless, two contradictory evaluations of the agriculture-led policy emerge from these discussions.

The first perspective is that the policy did not face too many problems because its logics were profoundly consistent with the leaders’ declared ambitions of transforming the country from the old rent-seeking culture of economic development paradigms (Ohno 2009). The second perspective, in contrast, holds that there was only a meagre level of success in productivity enhancement and the development of capacity-building programmes to better serve the long-term economic agenda, and the policies fell short of their predetermined goals such as food-sufficiency, and the fact that the growth in productivity was immediately followed by abrupt decreases was alarming; overall, the policies should not be recognized as a success, as they were inconsistent (Zewdie 2015). These two diverging insights agree in principle, however, that the notion that agricultural policies focused on smallholders was the right strategy and that the significant lack of technological and institutional capacities was to blame for most of the failures.

The main shortcoming of most of the assessments in the scholarly works that focus on the EPRDF’s ADLI scheme is that they fail to consider the

political climate and conduciveness for the EPRDF's programmes to succeed, such as be the federal arrangement. The assessments also take political leaders' speeches, as well as party programmes and other writings, at face value. It is crucial to stress, however, that the attempt here is not to discredit such assessments in any way. Rather, as one of the interviewees stated,

the regime's successes in certain measurable areas are attributed to the level of certain autonomy that few regional states had enjoyed in the implementation of such policies. In certain regions, where the ruling coalition had heavy-handedly interfered, however, the results were utter failures. The level of decline in agricultural productivity that was seen in later years of the ADLI era was also a good example of the result of a growing party structure that effectively overshadowed the Ministry of Agriculture's bureaucracy at all levels and the growing involvement of party endowments that started to sell farmers fertilizers and scientifically improved seeds in exaggerated prices, resulting in dissatisfaction and low motivation on the part of farmers.¹²

In the later sections of this chapter I look at the role of party-owned endowments' businesses in the country's economy, but the primary message from the above interviewee is that, when the interference by party officials and the party structure was significantly less, the policy implementation process yielded better results.

It is vital to reiterate that the political climate in general mattered most, and the magnitude of the EPRDF's dominance in the economic sphere also showed that each and every aspect of the policy formulation and implementation process started and ended with the ruling coalition itself. In this respect, the scenario in which the federal structure – comprising the four regional states administered by the four member parties of the EPRDF coalition, alongside what I refer to as the “so-called developing states”, run by the ruling coalition's affiliate parties' bureaucracies – is increasingly dominated by the party structure from the centre is important to consider. This is because the bureaucratic patrons of the regime, serving the interests of such a centralist party organization, led to the EPRDF's dominance of the economic sphere just as the manifestation of its political dominance effectively resulted in the ruling elites' growing success in their creation of a conducive and solid ground for its political survival.

With the advent of the new millennium, however, much of the ruling coalition's rhetoric and propaganda in selling the ideals of revolutionary democracy and its policies based on the original ADLI economic scheme slowed down. Many of the successive economic plans, which emerged one after the other by building from each other's successes and the lessons of their failures, had to be transformed. The late prime minister, Meles Zenawi, yet again, who remained the chief ideologue, propagandist in chief, and “strongman” leader of the ruling coalition, started to make the rounds about the need to

transform the country's economy and the lives of its citizens via adaptation of the developmental state economic growth and development paradigm. Recall the interview with interviewee 2 from the fieldwork conducted: the transition from revolutionary democracy to developmental state was seamless primarily because nothing significant actually evolved in terms of the EPRDF's economic ideology other than the branding of the economic and political programmes.

The interviewee had a point, in that the successive programmes under ADLI also prepared the regime to move towards the plan of adopting developmental state economic goals, which are more demanding of government intervention in all sectors of the economy. Hence, this shows that federal government interference in the economy, for the EPRDF elites, was not enough, and thus had to increase. To mention the most notable of the policies that followed the ADLI strategy, the Sustainable Development and Poverty Reduction Program (SDPRP), which served as the first five-year plan, and the Plan for Accelerated and Sustained Development to End Poverty (PASDEP), which was then set out by the EPRDF to meet donor nations' demands to strive to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), were partly successful in driving the country's economy to double-digit economic growth.¹³

In fairness to the assessment of the ruling coalition's new economic master plan, however, which the political elite would eventually refer to as Growth and Transformation Plans (GTPs) in the years that followed, the new economic direction called for increased spending on infrastructural development and the expansion of industrialization schemes via the formation of new industrial villages and dry ports across the main trade routes of the country, to mention a few examples. Hence, these new economic directions, which led to the emergence of mega-projects, mainly in the energy sector, the rehabilitation and construction of new rail track, the building of tens of thousands of kilometres of roads, and a booming construction and real estate sector, also led to new and critical challenges that further questioned the growing role of the party apparatus, which was visibly increasing its role by empowering the party endowments, signalling the military's arrival in the management structure of the economic sector by taking responsibility for running some of the state enterprises. Moreover, the further strengthening of clientelist relations and the emergence of military and private corporatist elements (highly connected with the regime), which seized greater influence as they embarked on working with the government through the creation of joint ventures, also became important actors. It is essential to bear in mind, however, the regime's declared commitment to democratic development by means of the paradigm that it referred to as democratic developmentalism, discussed earlier.

The first GTP that the government announced states:

The country's long-term vision, achievements of PASDEP and lessons drawn from its implementation are the bases for conceiving the next five-year Growth and Transformation Plan. The plan has also been prepared

considering growth constraining factors that emerged in the course of implementation and external shocks. Ethiopia's long-term vision is "to become a country where democratic rule, good-governance and social justice reigns, upon the involvement and free will of its peoples; and once extricating itself from poverty and becomes a middle-income economy." Its vision in the economic sector is "to build an economy which has a modern and productive agricultural sector with enhanced technology and an industrial sector that plays a leading role in the economy; to sustain economic development and secure social justice; and increase per capita income of citizens so that it reaches the level of those in middle-income countries.

(Ministry of Finance and Economic Development 2010: 7)

As clearly indicated in the mission and vision of the country's policy direction, the regime discusses the need to build the necessary ingredients for democratic development, though, as stated earlier, the coalition was rampant in its domination of the country's politics, with a highly strained and incapable opposition offering no challenge in terms of policies or directions whatsoever. Regardless, the regime kept its focus on agriculture as a driving force behind its new industrialization scheme, and the country would sustain its recording of double-digit economic growth for many years.

With its explanations of the lessons drawn from the implementation of the first GTP, the regime went on to declare why the government needed to increase its commitment to devote public resources to infrastructure expenditure, thereby owning the economy and constraining any signs of the liberalization of the fragile free-market-based economy that the EPRDF had promised in the first decade. In the second GTP (otherwise known as GTP II), the government's documents state:

The positive achievements of GTPI and lesson drawn from its implementation have been taken as input in the formulation of the Second Growth and Transformation Plan (GTPII). The national vision; existing national and sectoral policies, strategies and programs; performance under GTPI; commitment to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and regional and international economic collaboration initiatives were the basis for the formulation [of] the Second Growth and Transformation Plan (GTPII) through high level political leadership, public participation & ownership. The formulation of the GTPII has also passed through broad based consultation processes with relevant stakeholders at both regional & federal levels to enrich its content & forge national ownership of the Plan. Subsequently, the final version of the plan was approved by the council of ministers endorsed the Parliament to guide development endeavors in the country during the next five years, 2015/16–2019/20.

The major objective of GTPII is to serve as a spring board towards realizing the national vision of becoming a low middle-income country

by 2025, through sustaining the rapid, broad based and inclusive economic growth, which accelerates economic transformation and the journey towards the country's Renascence [*sic*].

(National Planning Commission 2016: ix)

GTP II lowered earlier expectations in terms of reaching low middle-income status by deferring the target date to 2025, as indicated above. The deficiencies of these programmes that transpired in the implementation process should also be discussed, however. In this regard, the next section looks at three issues. First, it addresses how the programmes impacted the rights issues in the country. Second, it assesses how the growing involvement of the state in the economy can be explained in terms of the party endowments' ever-growing dominance of the economy. And, last, it presents the issues and challenges confronting the management of state enterprises and growing corporatist pressure. In sum, these points will serve two purposes: to further assess the federal arrangement and economic relations between the various sectors; and to gauge how the issues in aggregate factor in to the explanations of authoritarian survival in broad terms.

The EPRDF's economic programmes and their impact on people's rights

Recall that most of the political and economic programmes of the TPLF-led EPRDF regime started by declaring goals about the promotion of group rights. What is puzzling, however, is that the promotion of these forms of rights failed to materialize in practical terms, as the marginalization of many minority groups under the regime's fragile ethnic federation unravelled. Instead, the propaganda surrounding the group rights agenda was widely and purposely used by the regime to curtail interests perceived as threatening to the ruling coalition. One of the most important strategies instrumental to the promotion of group rights and the government's economic programmes to groups in Ethiopia was the regime's use of the publicly owned media to portray political and economic activities in this respect. According to a former civil servant who used to work in one of the state-owned printing presses, the ruling coalition arranged a series of panels for journalists working for state-owned media organizations. In these training sessions, primarily designed to indoctrinate them about the ruling coalition's political and economic programmes, EPRDF cadres would instruct journalists that critics of such programmes should be considered as taking an anti-development stance. For instance, when I pressed the individual about the reactions of fellow journalists who worked for the state media agencies, the interviewee responded that

the regime in general, and the party member bureaucrats who manage such media institutions in particular, praise those individuals who keenly accept the "reform" training and consider them developmental

journalists. However, at the same time, they look at those who question the importance of such training sessions conducted by the regime as a restriction of press freedom, as potential enemies that must be replaced or fired at some point after the training sessions.¹⁴

The individual's account in fact aligns with what was discussed in Chapter 7, indicating the methods the ruling coalition used in subverting the bureaucracy's independence while turning civil servants into regime patrons. The rewards and the threats deployed with regard to those who worked for the state media agencies also fall into line with the discussions of the EPRDF's manipulation of the state bureaucracy in the last chapter.

The above explanation certainly shows how the regime used the government-owned media, administered by key party leaders, via effective manipulation of the journalists and journalism, which is essential to understanding the EPRDF programmes' negative impact on the issue of rights in general: how the widespread rights violations were suppressed and hence not addressed mainly started with either the lack of reporting of the violations or the under-reporting of them. We can see, according to the interviewee's further account, that news production in the state-owned and party-administered Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation was such that rights violations by the regime would remain unknown unless they were reported by independent journalists or opposition media outlets, and sometimes by the mostly independent international media. In this respect, the individual added that

every news item that we prepare must pass through extreme levels of censorship and approval by politicians from the ruling coalition. Even at times, someone from EPRDF leadership would actually call the news desk and demand for prime-time news anchors to read the prepared news items over the telephone, and the politician would further instruct the reader to make final corrections to one or more news items, which might also include an order to cancel the broadcasting of a certain news item or two altogether. This mainly happens when the international media or opposition media discuss rights violations, which mostly appear when the government violently evicts minority ethnic groups from their habitats or an issue of ethnic conflict is reported. Especially when some groups face displacement due to ethnic violence at times, and when some groups resist the government's instructions of vacating the areas that are needed for certain development projects, the military would burn villages, to the extent of killing those who protested. Hence, the regime's ruling elites make sure that the state-owned media agencies, across all print, radio, television, or digital platforms, provide coordinated responses that not only attempt to legitimize the regime's actions but also ensure such reports paint those who resisted orders as partners of anti-peace and anti-development elements.¹⁵

Overall, the implication of this interviewee's account is that the EPRDF set certain political and economic programmes or policies, then implemented them the EPRDF way by co-opting the regional state and federal bureaucracies, and the outcomes of these programmes were prepared and announced by the EPRDF propaganda machine in a way that portrayed only their successes.

Listing the regime's rights violations here would not greatly serve the goals of the chapter, as the mere fact that such violations existed should suffice. Most violations the regime perpetrated against group and individual rights occurred in two ways, however, out of the range of possible methods. The first type took place as a result of the impact of these new economic programmes, mostly in the second decade, leading to the forced evictions of many citizens without any prior consultations or agreements, and at times even without notice. Many smaller or minority ethnic groups lost their entire livelihoods as a result. Smallholding farmers who lived near urban centres were also forced to leave their homes and farmland without proper compensation, or at other times, if they asked questions, they would either be thrown into jail or exiled, or forced to remain in silence and continue to suffer from extreme poverty.

The second type, though similar in its impact, was unique, and that was the phenomenon of the land grab, which deprived many groups' rights to farmlands, restricted investment opportunities for the citizenry, caused considerable environmental impact, and – yet again – resulted in many forced evictions. Civil societies and organized societies that questioned such state-sponsored programmes were heavily suppressed. David Turton, who studied the state-run hydroelectric dam projects in the lower Omo Valley of southern Ethiopia and the impacts of such projects on groups of ethnicities in the area, states that such projects, even though they looked well intentioned, were extremely damaging in their ecological and societal impacts (Turton 2010: 12). By also relying, in part, on the seminal arguments by James Scott (1998), Turton captures the general picture of such development programmes:

There is no doubt that the leaders of the Ethiopian state are sincere believers in the “civilizational discourse” of state expansion: they genuinely believe that their plans for river basin development in the lower Omo will improve the human condition of its residents. It therefore becomes relevant to ask, as Scott does in *Seeing like a state*, why “so many well-intended schemes to improve the human condition have gone so tragically awry” (1998: 4). His answer is that “the most tragic episodes of state-initiated social engineering” have resulted from a combination of four elements, two of which are present in all modern nation-states: the “administrative ordering of nature and society” and a belief that the growing satisfaction of human needs can be achieved through scientific and technological progress ... The two crucial additional elements are, first “an authoritarian state that is willing and *able* ... to use the full

weight of its coercive power” and, second, “a prostrate civil society”. It is not difficult to recognize the presence of both these elements in the history of Ethiopian state-building in the southwest, from the first incursions of Abyssinian armies at the end of the nineteenth century, to the present government’s efforts to curb the activity of civil society organizations in the areas of social justice and human rights.

(Turton 2010: 12–13)

What Turton describes serves two important purposes in understanding the government’s intentions. First, despite the EPRDF’s political and economic programmes calling for the promotion of group rights, their actions in practical terms tell a different story. This in effect makes the ruling elite no different from previous regimes that they accused of suppressing group rights. Second, Turton’s argument also concurs with what has already been described above in terms of the regime’s suppression of those who either launch all-out protests or demand explanations. The rights violations as a result of the economic development programmes of the ruling coalition are too numerous to list here. As Turton mentions, the regime’s actions could also emanate from its very desire to embark on successful programmes as it envisages them being implemented. Nevertheless, the regime persisted in avoiding its commitment to rights issues as it continued implementing these programmes without consulting the locals or, when it did, without addressing the demands of the people.

It is also crucial to bring back the discussions of how the EPRDF effectively used the federal ethnic setting in connection with the development programmes outlined in its grandiose visions in the GTP I and GTP II plans. The EPRDF-led government mostly controlled developmental programmes using the regional state bureaucracy’s capacities for their implementation. For instance, the Ministry of Agriculture would disseminate guidelines on the implementation of certain programmes to each of the departments of agriculture of the regional states. Of course, different circumstances in the regional states might require different guidelines. For the EPRDF, however, that mattered less than its successes in development ambitions as a result of regional states’ implementation of the programmes in the way they were instructed to. It is not surprising that the success of the economic programmes varied from one regional state to another.

A civil servant who had worked for the Oromia regional state and travelled across many regional states as a federal employee stated that

the level of political autonomy that the regional states enjoy within the post-1991 federal setting does not in any way resemble to how it was supposed to look per what is written in the federal constitution. We have always been aware of the discrepancies of what the rules say and how they are practiced, and thus we had no choice but to act content with it. The problem, however, was that the government’s Growth and Transformation

Plans and their implementation strategies had completely outstripped the powers of the regional states.¹⁶

One might, appropriately, ask why the regime failed to abide by its own rules, and the explanation is, basically, straightforward: as stated repeatedly, the regime's political elites were fixated on the need to acquire further legitimacy from the populace by showcasing the successes of their economic development programmes, regardless of the costs involved in these achievements. I also asked the above-quoted individual about the regional political elites' views of the violations of the rights of groups in their respective regional administrations. The individual stated that,

in the world of the EPRDF, one major rule stands above everything, and that is what they refer to as party discipline. Keep in mind that, whatever economic programmes and guidelines are distributed by the regional states, the messages are considered as if they are arriving from the federal government. Given the party structure is deeply rooted across all levels of government in the federal setting, we all understand that such messages are coming from the EPRDF's headquarters in Addis Ababa. Therefore, not abiding by such guidelines, regardless of the questions we have on how some of the programmes would impact our citizens, is out of the question, as it will be considered as defying the strict party discipline.¹⁷

The individual's account is a testament that, regardless of the bad consequences of the programmes on the people's rights or the varying idiosyncratic circumstances under which such programmes had to be implemented across regions, the regional elites and the bureaucracies they oversaw were there solely to serve the party's interests.

How the EPRDF's economic programmes evolved irrespective of the fact that they were marred by rights violations can also be seen consistently with regard to the issue of land grabs. The overall impact of this problem, across the rights issues as well as in further diminishing the role of the regional states that are the "owners" of the land within their respective states, was quite massive. The federal government, effectively controlled by the ruling coalition, asserted its right to use any land in any regional state for the purposes of federally initiated economic development programmes. In other words, it indicates that, when the EPRDF decided to provide investment land for a foreign or domestic economic partner, it could do so without restrictions on its rights of "claiming" any land for development purposes. Of course, it suffices to recall what former premier Zenawi stated on the issue. Interviewee 2, who worked for the regime for over two decades, did not see any problem as such, however, but did agree with the frequently mentioned reasoning for the EPRDF's unrestricted use of regional state resources, such as land. The individual stated that

the areas that the federal government had already indicated for development projects are mostly located within the territories of under-developed regions, where the administrative capacities of their respective bureaucracy are limited. Therefore, the government perceives that, since the federal government has such a capacity, it becomes the regime's responsibility to make sure such areas are not left far behind the development schemes, mainly in comparison with other regional states where their bureaucracies are well established.¹⁸

In contrast, interviewee 6 disagreed, arguing that, "even in the Oromia regional state, where I worked for many years, the EPRDF's approach in the processes of implementation of its programmes is very much similar."¹⁹

In general, the takeaway remains that, no matter how much the economic development programmes, based on known economic paradigms, might be well intentioned, and notwithstanding the regime's successes in its interests, there is no debate as to whether there was any attempt to gain the positive acknowledgment of the public on the accomplishments of the programmes. Sadly, this came at a severe cost to the rights agenda. Nevertheless, the level of legitimacy acquired through the development programmes, and implemented through the effective utilization of the party structure across all levels of the federal setting, did undoubtedly put the EPRDF in a much stronger position for political survival until 2018.

The EPRDF's party endowments and state enterprises: the new challenges

Whether through the economic policies that made agricultural productivity a central focus or the economic programmes designed to attract foreign investors to increase food production, which was considered nothing but a "land grab", the ruling coalition failed to meet its preset goals (Lavers 2012). At the centre of everything, as indicated earlier, was the country's land policy, and the fact that it was nationalized left landownership as the sole preserve of the regime. This fact remained the greatest challenge impacting farmers' productivity, mainly because of the issue of economic insecurity. On the flip side, however, the regime's land policy created an opportunity for greater wealth creation for party-owned endowments, which happened to enjoy unrestricted levels of freedom that private entrepreneurs or investors did not. For the EPRDF, therefore, issues with regard to its policy on land were non-negotiable. As Stephen Devereux, Amdissa Teshome, and Rachel Sabates-Wheeler (2005), who analysed economic stagnation in the Ethiopian state and land policies across the previous regimes, state, although the regime outlined ways to protect the peasant-owned smallholding farms, it also seemed excessively rigid with regard to even correcting minor flaws in some of the policies on the topic.

Quoting the words of Zenawi, who ruled the state and the EPRDF for over two decades, the authors clearly state:

Prime Minister Meles argues that allowing land to become a tradable commodity would inevitably result in an “urbanization of rural poverty”. When the next major drought strikes, hungry families with nothing else to exchange for food will be forced to sell their land and, being displaced, will then migrate in enormous numbers to cities like Addis Ababa, where they will survive in squalor in squatter camps, with little prospect of securing formal employment. This is related to the “land as safety net” argument: even if tiny farms are inadequate for self-sufficiency, the family plot does provide some proportion of subsistence needs, and this safety net would be removed if land can be sold. Ideologically, the EPRDF shares the Dergue’s opposition to large landowners, and they believe that commercializing land will inexorably concentrate ownership in the hands of a minority. In his end-of-year report to Parliament in June 2004, Meles announced that the privatization of land in Ethiopia would take place only “over EPRDF’s dead body”.

(Devereux, Teshome, & Sabates-Wheeler 2005: 122)

The notion that the privatization of land could lead to an exodus of farmers into cities, and then rural poverty transforming into urban poverty, could hold water if their fears were to happen in reality, especially in the absence of ways to protect as well as transform the lives of such farmers, who continued to utilize primitive farm ploughing mechanisms and depended on rain-fed farming practices. As we can see from the above quote, however, the problem was that the regime considered correcting the flaws of its policies not only as unnecessary but as admitting that programme failures were more than dangerous to its political existence. The language of the late prime minister, Meles Zenawi, quoted above, proves just that. The question now becomes: why could the privatization of land be considered a danger to the survivalist political and economic programmes of the EPRDF? And was it only on the issue of land that the regime forbade privatization, or could the scope even encompass other economic sectors? The answers to both questions reflect the presence of political-party-run endowments and state enterprises that were also run by the political elites in the ruling coalition, and the protection of such party-run entities would become an important priority for the regime.

As Berhanu Abegaz (2011) explains, the issue of privatization of land and the private sectors’ involvement in the economy could very well impact the survivalist ambitions of the incumbents. The author states that

the impact of Party Owned Businesses on long-term wealth creation and distribution revolves around four empirically measurable variables: regime insecurity, its organizational capacity and discipline, its ideology, and the degree of centralization of the state it inherited. Mono-parties

in formerly socialist countries, which peddled universalistic class-based ideologies and faced no organized opposition from private business elite, needed only to focus on national defense, economic growth and the provision of basic needs to all in order to earn legitimacy to rule. Similarly, vanguard but narrowly based parties in market-led economies, on the other hand, are compelled to stand on multiple economic legs (private, party, state) to mitigate deep-seated political insecurity. Furthermore, the nexus of the four factors noted above suggest three possible paths of evolution: a paragonist path favoring a competitive politico-economic system, a parasitic path of entrenchment of organized interests that results in a poverty-tyranny trap, or an unstable mutualist path of coexistence of state, party, and private actors.

(Abegaz 2011: 3)

Indeed, as Abegaz makes it clear, insecure regimes rely on such mechanisms as party businesses and state enterprises, through which they seek the blessing of the ruled, and also rely on to avert existential threats that could come from privatization schemes. The fact that the dominant party within the ruling coalition, the TPLF, had not completely abandoned its socialist roots could also be an indication that its political elites might have learned from the mistakes of the old socialist republics. It was in this context that, in post-1991 Ethiopia, EPRDF member parties created endowments by directly assigning unaudited government finances to such causes, but also strengthened them throughout the bulk of the more than two and a half decades of EPRDF rule, to the point of becoming the unchallenged heavyweights in the economic sphere (Legesse 2016). These party businesses were led by party-appointed politicians. And leaders of party endowments effectively used the party structure to grow their political party's influence in the Ethiopian economy. Moreover, they also continued to make acquisitions of formerly state-owned enterprises and exploited the absence of fair economic competition to their favour; when a degree of competition occurred, the political parties would eliminate it by using the coercive powers of the party-led government (Legesse 2016).

The level of unfair economic competition that the presence of such party-owned endowments created was even discussed among the political elites in a few of the EPRDF's retreat camps, which were also used for training and brainstorming sessions for new political programmes. According to Ermias Legesse (2016), a former EPRDF politician who also served as a deputy minister, when Zenawi was attending one of those retreats he was asked by fellow EPRDF leaders about one of these endowments, which constituted a sizeable share of the Ethiopian economy and was administered by his wife, the former First Lady and member of parliament, Azeb Mesfin. The then prime minister not only downplayed the role of the endowment but also stated that EFFORT (the Endowment Fund for the Rehabilitation of Tigray) was actually facing huge problems that would endanger the organization's existence in the long term. Therefore, according to Zenawi, the political leaders who were

asking such questions should not be concerned about the potential impact of a “failing organization” on the economy. His response, according to Legesse, was quite dishonest, and all the participants in the meeting were quite aware of that. As usual, however, the problem in the EPRDF camp was that none of them had the courage to confront or question their prime minister, who was the chairman of both the TPLF and the EPRDF in all the 21 years that he served as the head of state, until his sudden death in 2012. For such elites, according to Legesse, confronting the TPLF’s highly revered leader would result in unwanted consequences. Today, in the wake of the 2018 political change following massive protests for rights and equality in most of the Amhara and Oromia regions, such party endowments, which were growing strongly, have mostly been transformed into regional state-owned enterprises and still count as major economic forces.

Another major aspect that has been missing from much of the discussion on the problems associated with the party-owned businesses is how much negative impact they might have on the group rights promotion agenda. A university professor who taught courses in public and private colleges alike in Addis Ababa, in an interview I conducted with him, said that,

when it comes to the increasing economic influence and dominance of the endowments, one particular issue ignored by the regime and critics alike is that of how such party-owned businesses belonging to four of the EPRDF member parties impact the economic rights of citizens. Besides the four regions directly controlled by the four parties that make up the EPRDF, the remaining regional states, which are considered developing regions and administered by EPRDF affiliate political parties that do not have any role in the economy, are also affected by such party endowments.²⁰

The interviewee added that such a role by EPRDF-owned endowments was damaging because,

if the endowments run by the EPRDF’s four parties are primarily designed to aid the development efforts of those four regions they administered, their affiliate parties in other regions, lacking such economic capacity, would leave them to continue to depend on the blessings of the EPRDF for their regions’ development efforts.

Indeed, the point raised by the individual shows that such regions that are being administered by the affiliate parties in fact depended solely on EPRDF’S party structure in receiving goods and services that they could have obtained from the private economic sector. According to the interviewee’s further account, regardless of whether a given economic sector was dominated by party endowments or state enterprises that the ruling elites administered as board chairmen or directors, the delivery of goods and services across all

levels of the federal setting had to pass through the party structure. Hence, the fact remains that the highly centralized party structure was about not just ensuring the continuity of the ruling coalition's political dominance but also guaranteeing the coalition's dominance in the economic realm.

In a vital example provided by one of my interviews, a civil servant who had worked for Amhara regional state's Bureau of Agriculture stated that, when Tiret Corporate (an endowment owned by the former ANDM, then the ADP, and now the Amhara army of the new Prosperity Party) was involved in the business of distributing fertilizers and seeds to farmers, the endowment had to use warehouses and offices that belonged to the regional administration at different levels of local government. The point is that the endowment never paid rents for using such facilities, or for its use of the regional state bureaucrats in selling its products.²¹ Here, what is critical is that distinguishing what the state owns from what the party owns was always a difficult task in Ethiopia under the TPLF-led EPRDF. As is evident from earlier chapters, demarcation lines differentiating the state from the ruling coalition were non-existent.

The problems discussed with regard to the endowments also prominently resurfaced across Ethiopia's state-owned enterprises. With the EPRDF's promises of some liberalization of the economy curbed by its adoption of developmental state economic growth and development strategies, the ruling elites' control of state enterprises grew enormously. With the state (EPRDF-led, at that) owning massive shares of land and facing no bureaucratic hurdles, this would mean that the growth of such enterprises had essentially become boundless. All the state enterprises in the country – including, among others, the Ethiopian Electric Power Corporation (EPCO), the Ethiopian Telecommunications Corporation (ETC), the Ethiopian Roads Authority, Ethiopian Airlines – were run by a board of directors headed by senior political elites within the EPRDF coalition (Legesse 2016). As a former minister who had also had the responsibility of closely monitoring and controlling certain state enterprises, and who lived in exile until 2018, informed me, although the board administering a given state enterprise had to provide quarterly reports directly to the minister's office, that had never occurred to him even once.²²

According to the individual, all such reports were directly delivered to the prime minister's office, bypassing other authorities in the chain of command of delivery of such time-bound reports. Even after the death of Meles Zenawi in 2012, according to the interviewee, he remained fully aware that the TPLF had been active in installing its influential political leaders to oversee such enterprises' activities. And most of these leaders, who served as advisors to the replacement prime minister, Hailemariam Desalegn, continued to receive such reports from state enterprises. This indeed shows that the situation had become even worse than before, given that the prime minister, who was the head of the government of the country, could not have a clear understanding of how such huge economic cash cows of the state were actually operating.

This is a testament to the magnitude of the political power the ruling coalition, and, most importantly, the TPLF, had in the Ethiopian state until 2018.

Unfortunately, the ruling coalition's dominance of the economic sphere, ranging from the party endowments to its control of state enterprises, actually grew even stronger in the last decade with the emergence of the Ethiopian military as another economic power. Given the scope of this chapter, discussing the process by which the military also emerged as an economic giant would be a daunting task, so understanding its ramifications should be left for another project. As indicated earlier, however, in the case of MetEC, a massive amount of borrowed money was embezzled. Today, following the political changes in 2018, and the coming of Abiy Ahmed to political power as prime minister, most of the officers with huge involvement in the running of such military-managed enterprises are now imprisoned.

Conclusion

The dominance of the ruling coalition in the economic sphere and the regime's limitless intervention in the economy, with its takeover of the properties of various groups in the name of further urbanization and industrializations schemes, were also the reason for the emergence of popular resentment, especially in two of the economically and politically important regions, namely the Oromia and Amhara regional states. In particular, the massive demonstration that erupted in Oromia in the summer of 2016, protesting against the expansion of the city limits of Addis Ababa, which Oromo leaders blamed for the eviction of Oromo farmers from their farmlands, were so big that the regime had to use its trusted military and police forces to crush them. Many peaceful protesters were met with live ammunition, and hundreds were killed. These new popular resentments continued as a time-bomb situation, however, further tantalizing and challenging the EPRDF's authoritarian rule. It was in this regard, I argue, that the growing role of the military and its commanders in the economy signalled that the regime's intentions in pushing the military to take over vital state projects and wealth emanated solely from its desire to gain the support of the army in the event of an increase in popular uprisings. Of course, the fact that the military's top echelons were highly dominated by ethnic Tigrayans who had kept the interests of the TPLF in mind at all times could make one believe that the military's involvement in the economy did not mean much either way. Given that instances of military control of economic engines in other countries have led to the survival of the regimes in power in those states, however, there would be no surprise in arguing that the EPRDF might also see in its military the last resort for ensuring its survival ambitions.

Fortunately for the masses, but unfortunately for the TPLF-led EPRDF, the massive protests that also emerged in Amhara region, especially in the historically influential Gondar and Gojam areas of the region, and the growing demonstrations and violent protests in Oromia were uncontrollable. This therefore led to the eventual resignation of the hard-working but highly

weakened premier, Hailemariam Desalegn, from the government that he had led for six years.²³

Following the political change after Desalegn's resignation, the new premier, Abiy Ahmed, started to promote what he referred to as a homegrown economic and political philosophy, known as *medemer* (an Amharic word that translates as "the coming together of ideas and efforts"). With *medemer* becoming the new ideology that guided the EPRDF in the first year and a half of Abiy's leadership, and that continued after the coalition was dissolved and Abiy led the nationally unified Prosperity Party, the country started new liberalization schemes and slowly, but surely, started to do away with EPRDF policies, which the former coalition had been promoting as *abyotawi* (revolutionary) economic and political thinking.

Some of the new economic and political plans promoted by Abiy Ahmed under his ideology of *medemer* is discussed in Chapter 10. In general, however, this chapter has shown that the now dissolved EPRDF coalition had engineered its political dominance through manipulation of the federal arrangement and had designed effective ways to ensure its dominance of the economic sphere. From its economic ideologies, which evolved from revolutionary democracy to developmental state growth strategies, and its efforts to control the economy, via its endowments and its manipulative management of state enterprises, the ruling coalition had indeed created a well-functioning deep state.

Whatever policies the regime had implemented across a few decades, however, they were not representative of its political and economic promises. Therefore, for the EPRDF's ruling coalition, its survival ambitions and its ceaseless efforts to add further legitimacy to its rule had outweighed the attention it paid to citizens' various economic and political demands. For the regime's elites, if the people were to enjoy their economic and political rights, then the EPRDF had to retain its grip on political power. Unfortunately, it is difficult to predict what the current incumbent regime might do, despite its rhetoric and its initial economic promises (which also face some criticism), to depart from the EPRDF's dysfunctional economic and political programmes, let alone their implementation. Hence, much remains to be seen.

Notes

- 1 These time frames, though indicated as the "first and second decades", in actuality could cover more than 20 years.
- 2 The interview with interviewee 2 was conducted on March 14, 2017, in Washington, DC.
- 3 Although the NDR model (national democratic revolution) is a Marxist-Leninist ideology, the NPDR model (national popular democratic revolution) is a Stalinist-Maoist (Albanian-Chinese) ideology, which the TPLF had to adopt on realizing that the socialist regime they were fighting against at the time was, of course, just like them – i.e., Marxist-Leninist. This explanation is taken from Bach's description of the changes (Bach 2011: 642).

- 4 Although Keller's mentioning of the Amhara and Amharized societies is in part true, his argument seems incomplete. First, not only Amharas but most Ethiopians today believe the flaws in the federal setting are too many. Second, it falls short of explaining why, despite the ruling coalition's interest in embarking on such reforms through the empowering of ethnicities, the ethnically formed regional states were not endowed with a level of real autonomy in doing so.
- 5 Chaebols are big businesses and conglomerates.
- 6 For Meles Zenawi's speech, watch www.youtube.com/watch?v=HIT_jgROiXw.
- 7 Zenawi's views can be seen at www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZDrZpaSMCPE.
- 8 The interview with interviewee 13 occurred on June 24, 2017, via a telephone conversation, and the location is withheld as agreed.
- 9 The interview with interviewee 11 occurred in Atlanta, Georgia, on June 23, 2017.
- 10 Merkato is a large open market located in the heart of Addis Ababa, and it is considered the largest open market in Africa.
- 11 The email exchange with interviewee 10 occurred from June 17 to 19, 2017.
- 12 Interviewee 13.
- 13 The double-digit growth touted by the EPRDF, as well as by international financial organizations (mainly the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund), has been contested by some, with alternative figures that call into question the rate of growth. As most of the MDG indicators have shown, however, growth in the economic sphere cannot be debated without regard to the failures on predetermined goals, such as "ending poverty".
- 14 The conversation with interviewee 7 took place in Amsterdam on July 1, 2017.
- 15 Interviewee 7.
- 16 My interview with interviewee 6 was conducted on June 17, 2017, in Atlanta, Georgia, and a follow-up interview was conducted the next day.
- 17 Interviewee 6.
- 18 Interviewee 2.
- 19 Interviewee 6 was interviewed at a similar time to interviewee 2.
- 20 The interview with interviewee 18 was conducted on June 14, 2017, in Atlanta, Georgia.
- 21 The interview with interviewee 24 was conducted in a telephone interview on June 16, 2017.
- 22 I conducted the interview with individual 23 on July 8, 2017, at an undisclosed location, as agreed with the individual.
- 23 The circumstances under which Desalegn resigned are discussed in detail in Chapter 10.

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9 Critical junctures in the rise and decline of the EPRDF

Introduction

The EPRDF coalition's efforts in concocting a constitutional framework that introduced and implemented ethnic federalism as an institutional design promoting group rights was quite a failure, as it did not achieve most of its preset goals, or, at least, the achievements have been somewhat exaggerated. One significant success, however, though not much discussed until this work, was that the achievement was limited to how it helped the political elite presiding over the coalition to prolong their political reign despite the fact that the two dominant and majority ethnic groups in the country, the Oromo and the Amhara, were devoid of any political power, as they had been marginalized by the TPLF, the coalition's power player. The success in the political survival of the coalition was indeed attributable to a TPLF-controlled political machine whose mechanisms of manipulation extended from controlling the political discourse in the federal government in Addis Ababa to effectively co-opting the political elites presiding over the regional states across the board. The TPLF-led EPRDF's strength indeed emerged as a result of the party structure, which successfully engulfed the bureaucracy, and its tight control of the security and intelligence community, whose leadership across all levels was dominated by ethnic Tigrayans and TPLF members. Hence, with these factors along with the ethnic federal setting, which was permissive for any one group with a manipulative political organization to dominate others, the TPLF-dominated coalition's chances of keeping its grip on political power were already formidable from the start.

Various degrees of post-election violence and turmoil in different cities (first mostly in the capital, Addis Ababa) throughout the last decade before 2018, which some within the weakened political opposition as well as neutral observers had hoped for, would challenge the incumbents' dominance of political power but did not accomplish anything. Instead, periodic political unrest led to thousands of civilian deaths and the detention of tens of thousands.

A few years later, however, first-of-their-kind “nationwide” (chiefly in the Amhara and Oromia regions) protests, which had mostly gathered steam in the summer of 2016 and which many observers of Ethiopian politics had considered unprecedented in terms of their size and magnitude, started to slowly shake up the EPRDF. Ultimately, such protest movements achieved a major milestone only just short of a political revolution, as they engendered up a major political change within the EPRDF. Thus, for the first time in its history there was political change born out of such protest movements, with the help of major internal revolts within the EPRDF, pulling the coalition out of the shadow of the TPLF leadership. Regardless of this political change, which paved the way for the emergence of such politicians as a future Nobel laureate (the prime minister, Abiy Ahmed) and a reinvigorated and long-serving deputy prime minister (Demeke Mekonnen), understanding quite how an unpopular political coalition dominated by a liberation front from a minority ethnic group that represented no more than 6 per cent of the population remains a challenging question that needs further investigation.

Therefore, in an effort to answer such a question, this chapter presents the Ethiopian–Eritrean War, which broke out in 1998, claimed hundreds of thousands of lives on both sides, and led to an episode of break-up within the TPLF core leadership, as the first major critical juncture in the evolution of the coalition. Then, Ethiopia’s 2005 national election and the developments that followed are examined as the second most important juncture. Third, the death of the then prime minister, Meles Zenawi, and the confusion and dysfunction that occurred within this once historically formidable political coalition is presented. These three junctures are the most critical points in the life of the TPLF-led EPRDF’s rule of the Ethiopian state since the coalition came onto the political scene after the fall of the military regime. Last, the chapter ends with a brief discussion of the political change that occurred in 2018. The political change was indeed the last major episode that changed the face of the ruling coalition, as the TPLF’s power dwindled into more of an opposition role after its leadership retreated to Mekele, the Tigray region’s capital.

These critical junctures are not only events that tested the coalition and its rules; they also represent the resilience of the coalition’s leadership in surviving these existential challenges – at least, until it could not do so any longer. Such pivotal points in Ethiopia’s contemporary political discourse are not only marked as crucial events that challenged the EPRDF’s rule, but they also influenced the regime’s sweeping changes in the way the leadership managed its political tenure throughout its time. The discussion of these events will also take place mostly in parallel with the evolution of Ethiopia’s ethnic federal arrangement, however, and how the ruling coalition ambitions and efforts of survival coped with the challenges in most of the last 28 years of its rule.

Critical juncture I: after the Ethiopian–Eritrean War, a fractured TPLF and its loyal coalition

Eritrea was once part of the Ethiopian state, enjoying a slightly higher level of political autonomy in comparison with other regions across the country. The roots of the complex and tenuous history between Eritrea and Ethiopia date back to the era of Emperor Menelik II, however. As already stated in the first few chapters of this book, one of Menelik's foremost legacies, recalled by pan-Ethiopian nationalists, is the emperor's leadership, which galvanized the country's mostly primitive societies and patriotic farmers to pick up arms (mostly shields and swords, as well as a small number of modern armaments) to fight a modern European army, that of Italy, as it attempted to colonize the country. In fact, Ethiopia's victory over Italy, then a newcomer to the colonial scene, and its effect on the conundrum of the partition of Africa remains the most important historical episode in the continent's struggle against colonialism, in addition to its significance for the study of international relations in the twentieth century. The problem, however, was that Menelik's victorious army, after defeating the Italians, did not advance beyond the Mereb River, a climatic feature that is also used to demarcate the border between Ethiopia and Eritrea. The Eritreans saw the decision by Menelik II as a historic mistake, which evolved into making the Eritreans feel that they were in fact not desired by the Ethiopian Empire, as Menelik's "betrayal" (in their view) exposed them to decades of colonial rule under Italy (Péninou 1998). On the Ethiopian side, such views are disputed, as many rationalize Menelik II's decision not to advance as a direct result of the strain the peasant army that the emperor led was under.

Nonetheless, following Italian colonial rule for more than half a century, the Eritreans returned to join the Ethiopian state under the leadership of Emperor Haile Selassie I in 1951, after a United Nations resolution called for a confederation with the motherland, while granting Eritrea the autonomy associated with its status as a confederate state. The Ethiopia–Eritrea confederation was short-lived, however; Haile Selassie's desire to rule over a unified country and a unionist movement in Eritrea that called for complete reunification with Ethiopia effectively abolished the confederacy in 1961 (United Nations 1951).

As we recall from earlier chapters, it was around the same political era when the unification of Eritrea with the rest of the Ethiopian Empire was completed that most of the anti-regime rebellions representing ethnic grievances emerged across the country. It was also during this same period that Eritrean rebels against the Ethiopian state emerged. The Eritrean People's Liberation Front was the strongest, both among other Eritrean rebel groups and among the rebel armies of other groups in the Ethiopian state. Of these rebel forces, the EPLF and the TPLF were the ones with the closest relationship, exhibiting high levels of cooperation. The strong

relationship between the two occurred for two important reasons. First, they both despised what they referred to as the “Amhara domination” of the Ethiopian state, and the fact that both groups called for a struggle for the independence of their respective groups (Eritrea and Tigray) from what they perceived as unjust political domination was one major commonality. Second, though more importantly, was the fact that both the EPLF and the TPLF represented Tigrinya-speaking groups, thus making their military cooperation and understanding easier. Many also credit the EPLF with being the political force that trained, mostly armed, and organized the TPLF to become the dominant force it was in the era of struggle against the socialist regime, and eventually the force it became by creating and manipulating the EPRDF coalition in today’s state of Ethiopia, known formally as the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (Sishagn 2000).

After the defeat of the military socialist regime in 1991, and the eventual declaration, after a referendum, that the EPLF had managed to secede Eritrea from the Ethiopian state, the differences between the TPLF (which eventually created and dominated the EPRDF ruling coalition) and the EPLF (the only legal party running the government in Eritrea) grew significantly, and their relations started to sour. Without going into more detail on the historical development of these one-time rebel allies and now dominant political organizations ruling over two different countries, however, it is important to elucidate how the soured relations between the two led to the fracturing of the EPRDF coalition in general, and how that should be considered a critical test in the TPLF-led EPRDF coalition’s quest for political survival following its assumption of power in 1991.

A new challenge and the EPRDF’s dramatic survival

Leaving aside the major and immediate causes for the outbreak of the inter-state war between Ethiopia and Eritrea, which was started when the latter invaded the small town of Badme in 1998, the discussion here gives more emphasis to the conclusion of the war, which ended with victory by the Ethiopian National Defense Force (ENDF), which had not only regained the invaded territories but also advanced close to the Eritrean capital, Asmara, until an internationally brokered ceasefire stopped the destructive hostilities. The war was a complete disaster for both nations, however, and their impoverished economies. At the end the post-war atmosphere looked like a lose-lose scenario, partly because of the hundreds of thousands of lives lost on both sides, but also with clear evidence of the overwhelmingly strained economies the war had left behind. As Richard Reid (2003), who wrote extensively on the anatomy of the war, explains, the war was much about political disagreements and growing mutual disrespect between Ethiopia’s dominant TPLF and the Eritrean government led by the Popular Front for Democracy and Justice (after a name change from EPLF). Thus, according to Reid, the most destructive inter-state war was a war between the TPLF and EPLF, due

to tense relations between the two, and the characters of the two leaders of the fighting countries and the political organizations they chaired. As he explains:

These were two bald men fighting over a comb; two poverty-stricken African nations (the “hostile tribes” concept was lurking just below the surface) fighting for pride at the expense of the material dignity of their populations; two ignorant governments engaging in brutal and bloody “First World War tactics” for pieces of insignificant land. When Africans fight, the world tuts disapprovingly, which is one thing, and condescendingly, which is another. But in looking at the nature of Eritrean–Tigrayan relations over time and space, one thing is clear in the first instance: the war itself, while it took most (including the author) by surprise when it first came to public attention, was not a tragic but isolated interruption of the normal course.

(Reid 2003: 374)

Notwithstanding this important explanation on the war’s effects, during and after the war with Eritrea severe divisions among the core leadership of the TPLF emerged. These divisions within the TPLF leaders focused on issues of the management of the war as well as on the questions of the most important decisions to be made in post-war crisis management in Ethiopia (Gudina 2002; Reid 2003; Clapham 2009).

The management of the war and other post-war political decisions were mostly made by the prime minister, Meles Zenawi. His supporting cast of leaders within the TPLF started to encounter challenges from other strong leaders within the same liberation front, however. Zenawi and his supporting faction within the TPLF consequently faced the daunting task of winning over a faction led by the former minister of defense, Seye Abraha, and his supporters, who had criticized the anatomy of the decisions that were made in the war against Eritrea and the political proceedings that followed. The Seye Abraha faction, among others, accused Zenawi’s leadership of the war as having aided Eritrea, while also invoking the blood ties that the prime minister had with Eritrea given that his mother was an Eritrean, who was even rumoured to have voted for secession (Teka 2010). What was interesting, however, was that, given the magnitude of the TPLF’s dominance over the EPRDF ruling coalition, the problem that emerged within such a dominant member of the ruling coalition would grow to become a critical challenge to the EPRDF at large, and, thus, the country as a whole.

As a consequence, what followed was that an unprecedented level of political crisis engulfed the EPRDF ruling coalition’s discussions of uncertainties. Analysing these problems of governance occurring within the Ethiopian government, Christopher Clapham states,

The crises that beset the ruling political coalition (the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front, EPRDF) of Meles Zenawi in Ethiopia,

after the apparently triumphant conclusion to its border war against Eritrea in May 2000, were only partially of its own making. This is not the place to delve into deeply contested histories, but it is at least necessary to place the developments that led to the impasse so apparent by the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century in their broader context. This impasse was not merely the outcome of failed democratization, or human rights abuse, or even indeed poverty, but was, rather, the latest expression of much deeper problems that derive from the inherent contradictions of state creation and maintenance in a perennially violent corner of Africa.

(Clapham 2009: 181)

In line with Clapham's explanation, despite the ramifications of the war dominating the reasons for the emergence of crisis within the TPLF (and, so, the nation), concerns over maintaining the political order in a polarized Ethiopia and careful balancing of the changing political atmosphere with the regime's ubiquitous priority of survival were essential. Here, it is important to identify what really saved the ruling coalition, challenged as it was by the magnitude of the division within the TPLF leadership. A former member of the Oromo People's Democratic Organization leadership – that is, one of the political parties making up the EPRDF coalition – stated that

the crisis within the TPLF during the post-war period, mostly in the years between 2002 and 2004, became a huge concern for the rest of the political parties that make up the ruling coalition. Especially, leaders of the political parties within the coalition, mainly ANDM and OPDO, also became divided on where to side when the TPLF leadership became a fractured group. Such parties started to mediate between the two factions of the TPLF, knowing that any failure would lead to the development of existential threats to the EPRDF as a coalition. What was also crucial is that, within the ANDM and OPDO camp, we knew that, given that the military and intelligence apparatus was highly dominated by the TPLF, such divisions could imply a further fracturing of the army and the security forces at large, which would then open up the country to other serious challenges. But the fact that such arduous mediations failed mean that, for ANDM and OPDO as well as the relatively weak SEPDM, the three parties' leaders had to step in and stand on the side of the TPLF faction led by the prime minister, Meles Zenawi.¹

In my fieldwork, which spanned more than half a year, from January to July 2017, what astounded me the most in the answers received for the majority of my questions on this issue was most respondents' admiration for the political gamesmanship of the late prime minister, Meles Zenawi. Most applauded Zenawi for his negotiating skills and intellectual prowess, which

they witnessed from his drafting of most of the EPRDF's political strategies, at times after just a single night's work. In particular, some praised how he manipulated the political elite's minds within the ruling coalition and how he persuaded them to carry out party directions that he had assigned to them single-handedly. The opinion expressed by the above interviewee was no different from those others. The interviewee stated that the political backing that Zenawi received from the other EPRDF leaders was, in part, because of the foolish assumptions of ANDM and OPDO officials thinking that a more balanced EPRDF might emerge, given their belief that the break-up within the TPLF leadership had shown that domination of the coalition by a single party was not sustainable; thus, by siding with Zenawi's faction, the desirable outcome of stabilizing the coalition and re-forming the balance of power within the EPRDF might be achieved. This was how the individual articulated what happened:

Zenawi was extremely skilful and articulate when convincing both the members of his faction within the TPLF and the Oromo and Amhara political elites by promising them greater roles in his Cabinet shake-ups and persuading them to work with him with promises of the emergence of a more balanced EPRDF (admitting the TPLF's prior dominance), and even stating his deceitful commitment to being open about discussion of leadership succession. Of course, as was clearly evident later, the TPLF, even after the fracturing of its political leadership, was able to quickly redeem itself. As such, Zenawi's political skills in artfully deceiving his EPRDF colleagues effectively paved the way for his own party's continued political redemption and then domination.²

The political debacle within the TPLF leadership that emerged as a result of the post-war crisis would soon be solved with the aid of the political elites from EPRDF member political parties such as the ANDM and OPDO rallying to Zenawi's faction of the TPLF. Moreover, the regime would then charge some strongmen within the opposing faction of the former TPLF leadership with corruption charges, and some who it perceived as less threatening were also discharged from their administrative duties and made to start civilian lives. How the EPRDF leadership, under the leadership of strongman Zenawi, took effective control of such a challenging political development is also interesting. In particular, how the then prime minister first charged and then threw out Seye Abraha, the former defense minister who was also the main leader behind the break-up within the TPLF, to a six-year spell in prison is especially well documented. Assefa Fiseha (2016), who discusses "legislative-judicial relations" in the country, shows how the regime even made unexpected changes to the country's laws to make sure that Abraha remained in prison with no opportunity for the bail that the constitution would otherwise have guaranteed him. Therefore, in the absence of any

constitutional rule that would protect an accused individual's civil liberties, Fiseha contends,

Following a split within the ruling party in 2001, Seye Abraha, a former defense minister, was accused of grand corruption and brought before a court. When the lower courts ruled that the accused should be released on bail, which is a constitutional right by virtue of article 19(6), ... parliament hastily convened to enact a law that deprived all persons accused of corruption of the right to bail. Following this development, the press nicknamed the law "Seye Abraha's law". This was not the end of the story. Several years later and after the new law had served its function, parliament amended the law reinstating the right to bail to persons accused of corruption where the charge entailed a potential sentence not exceeding ten years' imprisonment.

(Fiseha 2016: 276)

As is evident from the regime's manoeuvrings in the legislative assembly, first in terms of how its security forces superseded the court's ruling to release Abraha by bailing him, and then how the coalition leaders made sure that constitutional amendments were passed to ensure that the accused, who posed a threat to the TPLF and hence to the coalition's political dominance, remained in jail, these moves constituted yet another sign that the EPRDF would do anything to enact bogus laws to help it keep the coalition in power.

Going back to discussion of how the Oromo and Amhara political elite within the EPRDF came to the rescue of Zenawi's camp in the TPLF, it is clear that their decision was a simple one to make. And that was in no small part a consequence of the political turmoil that occurred in 2003 in Addis Ababa. At that time, Addis Ababa University students were rising up, mostly in protest at the lack of academic freedom and demanding reforms in that area. The protests led to a significant level of unrest in the capital, however, resulting in lootings of jewellery shops and businesses mostly owned by ethnic Tigrayans. Violence of this kind was considered unusual, as there had been nothing like it for well over a decade of EPRDF coalition rule, signifying that, unless there was strong unity within the ruling coalition's elites in asserting their control of the political environment, such unrest could lead to nationwide violence that could even escalate into an eruption of ethnic tensions and conflicts, posing a danger to their political rule. The fears these events aroused within the non-TPLF political elites in the EPRDF were, thus, important in further solidifying the rationale behind the coalition's efforts in coming together to rescue the regime from the critical test it faced as a result how the war between Ethiopia and Eritrea had ended.

Furthermore, it is clear to see how the trajectory of this challenge, which tested the EPRDF coalition and how its leadership came out of the situation, fits with much of my discussion as to how the ethnic federal arrangement in the country evolved parallel to the ruling coalition's effective control of

the political environment and its setting up of co-optation mechanisms. In fact, despite the TPLF's dominance of Ethiopian politics for 28 years at the national level, its political base in the Tigrayan regional state and its supporters' minority status in Ethiopia's demographic make-up meant that the party's leaders' political survival ambitions and programmes required them to rely on the co-optation mechanisms, which they had effectively devised to ensure they kept their grip on political power.

Recapping the first major pivotal event that challenged the EPRDF, the regime successfully coped with the unrest within the TPLF that led to the departure of some and the imprisonment of others. But the EPRDF coalition's three other parties, still dominated by the TPLF, saw that the promise of achieving a balance of power between the EPRDF leaders did not come to fruition. No attempt at all was made to attain balanced power sharing within the coalition, and the EPRDF ship of state continued to sail on with no significant challenges on the political waves. After surviving the first major political test that the regime faced in its first decade of political rule after war against Eritrea, and after regaining the calm it so needed, the coalition then acted in a rather surprisingly democratic way, however, which aroused quite a bizarre feeling among the populace – a view with which most of the interviewees agreed with regard to questions on the 2005 national election.

Critical juncture II: the elections in 2005 and the EPRDF's “We are here to stay” politics

The EPRDF coalition had faced several existential challenges since the start of its rule in 1991, but successfully coped with all of them to its own satisfaction. Even for the events discussed as the first critical juncture, it did not take long for the EPRDF to reclaim its command of the political climate in its favour. The exit of the Oromo Liberation Front from the initial partnership, discussed above, could also be considered one such pivotal moment or test in the coalition's evolution, as the OLF had become the strongest political party in the country's modern history and the most effective in creating a dominant-party state and a political playground beneficial only to the EPRDF family. It is critical to note, however, that the OLF's exit from its partnership with the EPRDF at the transitional period, though significant, has not been included among the critical junctures given that, like many other small challenges, its overall impact in shaping the ruling coalition's survivalist politics was quite minimal.

As exhibited in the first major pivotal moment in its survivalist reign, not only did the EPRDF coalition master the political aspect, by manipulating the courts and the legislative assembly in asserting its power for the next few years after the political tension in the period from 2001 to 2002, but also, in so doing, the TPLF acquired the requisite time to reform its way of doing things with regard to dealing with the coalition's three other parties. Thus, the TPLF got all the members of these parties taking courses and seminars

that were nothing but efforts to re-equip the political elite, across all federal and regional state administrative levels, with the new course of direction and mechanisms of propaganda that the coalition would be relying on as it attempts to make adjustments after the political upheavals that it faced from within (within the TPLF).

Moreover, the periodic evaluations that the EPRDF conducted in the course of each year also came in handy, in terms of helping the coalition identify dissent of any kind and magnitude among its members. And such evaluations had been the party's "strength", as it tightly focused on its survivalist ambitions by instituting corrective measures that were at times directed against its own cadres if they appeared to challenge the coalition's bosses. Jean-Nicolas Bach, who observed the importance of evaluations (or *gimgema*, in Amharic) for the tightly controlled and centralized EPRDF coalition, states,

Democratic centralism reveals above all the rigid and hierarchical structure of the EPRDF coalition and is, among others, illustrated by the *gimgema*. These "politico-administrative evaluations allow the appointment and discharge of civil servants and government officials to be manipulated and subverted". "Criticism" and "self-criticism" procedure is thus presented as "an instrument used to reprimand defects and mistakes in members". This practice inherited from the TPLF internal organization during the struggle is now at the center of the administrative system in which the ruling party finds a powerful way of controlling the affiliated party members.

(Bach 2011: 647)

Apart from the values this TPLF culture of evaluations brought to the needed stability of the coalition's rule, the efforts of the coalition in also understanding the differing ideas that appeared within its members also assisted it to emerge from most of the challenges it faced even stronger than it had been previously. The EPRDF's strength, among other things, was its successful mechanisms for pacing its elites to face shared challenges in unison.

About five years after the conclusion of the war with Eritrea, however, reforms in the EPRDF-dominated political scene started to be witnessed. This is, of course, irrespective of the fact that lingering TPLF dominance remained in the shadow of each and every political development. Such small but important reforms led to the opening of the political climate for the first time since the very start of the EPRDF's hold on political power in the country. Although it was inexperienced and mostly unorganized, the political opposition seized on this opportunity with open hands, and the fact that the 2005 national elections were also approaching became an added bonus. Opposition figures returning from exile, renowned intellectuals, and some entrepreneurs within the business community arrived on the political scene, either by joining the already existing but weak opposition parties or by coming together in

forming a new one. Thus, they did not waste time before they delved deep into the electoral scene to prepare, compete, and challenge the EPRDF coalition's dominance. Hence, as the 2005 national elections approached, the electoral atmosphere became nothing short of impressive (Samatar 2005; Arriola 2003; Lyons 2006; Aalen & Tronvoll 2009).

Moreover, not only did the EPRDF regime show its sudden "democratic" intentions by easing its repressive tactics against the opposition, but also the regime declared that the elections would be free and fair, and the necessary state-sponsored electoral funds would be provided to opposition parties. The pre-election debates in the prior months and weeks before the 2005 general election were too many to count, and most EPRDF elites who either served as advisors and ideologues to the coalition in power or in hold of ministerial Cabinet positions openly debated against articulate and intellectual leaders of the opposition in open and surprisingly direct debates, even at times trading direct jabs and criticisms with each other.

The debates, which were broadcast live on state-owned radio stations and the state-owned television channel (EBC), created quite a thrilling democratic scene that kept everyone in the country surprised and questioning how the regime could, all of a sudden, open up the media sphere, and even how it could be possible for the regime's leaders to sit down with opposition figures who openly criticized and embarrassed them. In a country plagued with an authoritarian political culture and no history of democracy, these were in fact genuine surprises. Two opposition coalitions, namely the United Ethiopian Democratic Front (UEDF, or simply Hibret in Amharic, meaning "Unity") and the Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD, or simply Kinjit in Amharic, meaning "Coalition" or "Coordination"), consolidated their positions as opposition political coalitions, not for the sake of just coalition making, as seen from examples in the make-up of opposition parties in the past, but so that they would be considered real contenders.

The time arrived, and the May 2005 national elections took place with an unprecedented and highly celebrated electoral turnout and proceeded in a comparatively peaceful manner. Notwithstanding the relatively calm elections, however, leaders of the political opposition continued registering their complaints on the election irregularities, ranging from the harassment of voters to the regime's introduction of fake and pre-arranged ballots, which the opposition contended were designed to undermine the electoral outcome. Given the citizens', opposition parties', and independent observers' understanding of such issues, it seemed clear to all that the EPRDF's apparent commitment to electoral openings was not so genuine, as its old ways of manipulating the political process immediately re-emerged. The opposition, which, at the conclusion of the election, had won almost 50 per cent of the electoral contests according to the officially released electoral records, was left with nothing but its old need to complain. Suddenly, all the hope of democratic consolidation vanished, and the EPRDF's political tactics of repression were seen to have remained the norm.

Unlike past regimes, the fact that the EPRDF was even taking a shot at a democratic attempt could be commendable. The problem, however, was that, for the Ethiopian public, it had become clear that the EPRDF was going to pursue its survivalist politics while playing with citizens' minds by, at times, fooling them into believing that a true attempt at democratization was a possibility. Unfortunately, the 2005 national election was marred by complaints of fraudulent practices; there were calls and campaigns for the EPRDF to accept poll recounts, but when these took place they returned even worse results that favoured only the ruling coalition. Nonetheless, such a historical episode created a feeling among the citizens that the 2005 general election was the country's closest shot for the prospects of democratization, as well as for the EPRDF to redeem itself as a reformist coalition, and the outcome discouraged further democratic aspirations. As Jon Abbink states,

The elections were a step forward but did not signify a decisive, non-reversible move towards democracy because of the uncertainty about the counting procedures, the real results, and the controversial government response. Not only the Ethiopian public, but also donor countries, and development partners, who invested a lot in the "Ethiopian example", were greatly disillusioned. The 2005 elections and their aftermath thus revealed major constraints in Ethiopia's political system, underlining that after the regimes of Emperor Haile Selassie (1930–74) and the military leader Mengistu (1974–91), centralist authoritarianism is not gone but perhaps is being reinvented in a new form.

(Abbink 2006: 174)

As Abbink's explanations show, despite the rising expectations from the public, it was clear to most students of Ethiopian politics that the EPRDF could reverse its course at any given time, for the simple reason that, since its inception, the coalition's political moves indicated that survivalist political approaches came first and all matters of service to the nation came later – or not at all. Moreover, although Abbink's explanation invoking the similarities of the EPRDF coalition's authoritarian tendencies and its centralist ruling regime to that of the old regimes is valid, even from my extended discussion of how the ethnic federal institutionalization played out two things are evident: first, that the regime not only effectively used its patrons from the bureaucracy, and the party structure all over the Ethiopian federation, in its successful manipulation of the electoral outcome; and, second, the coalition and its leaders, led by strongman Meles Zenawi, immediately enacted different measures, ranging from the declaration of a state of emergency, which stripped the public's right to peaceful demonstration, to the imprisonment of political leaders from the opposition, who were still contesting the results of the election. As Berhanu Abegaz states, "Ethiopia finds itself once again at the crossroads. The May 2005 national elections have presented the country with a clear-cut choice between a functional multiparty democratic

system or a patrimonial state-party system” (Abegaz 2005: 33). Indeed, what appears to have emerged is the latter. Hence, the national elections of that year showed that the EPRDF opened the doors of democratic electoral competition, and then immediately closed them again after it smelled a political defeat at the ballot box. For the EPRDF, failing to address such an existential challenge would signal nothing other than putting its survivalist political approach to bed.

The EPRDF’s mechanisms of co-optation functioned to guarantee that the regime kept its upper hand in electoral processes as well as outcomes. The spending of donor funds to strengthen the party structure, the use of food aid in buying votes and electoral support in general, and the deployment of security forces in urban and semi-urban areas of the country to create an uneasy political atmosphere were some of the techniques that this book has already explained. Similar measures were seen by Alemayehu Gebre Mariam (2010), who interviewed opposition leaders after the 2010 election, which the regime dominated hugely, though they are very relevant to understanding the situation before and after the national election of 2005. Mariam states,

The security network is so sophisticated that it has Stalinesque quasi-directorates consisting of party and security organizations working together to maintain around-the-clock surveillance of citizens and generate and distribute real-time intelligence on individual households through an established chain of command. According to Dr. Negasso,³ the local commissariats have expansive powers of investigation, arrest, interrogation and detention. They maintain a network of anonymous informants and agents who provide tips for the identification, investigation and arrest of local individuals suspected of disloyalty to the regime. They control and regulate the flow of information and visitors in and out of the town. Apparently, they even have the power to deport anyone considered *persona non grata* from the town. In general, there is little question that the commissariats and the interlocking quasi-directorates engage in repression and widespread human rights abuses against the local population.

(Mariam 2010: 31)

The regime, which had boasted about formally introducing democracy in a fundamental way during that electoral period, of course eventually perceived the national election of 2005 as a learning curve, and refocused its agenda of appealing to the masses, saying: “The EPRDF is your only choice, and the opposition are here to distract us from our development strategies, which will help rescue the whole country from the keenly felt poverty it has been suffering under.”

Mariam also had the opportunity to discuss the regime’s response to that particular election’s outcome with two individual members of the EPRDF coalition’s member parties, one a member of the ANDM and the other a

member of the SEPDM. In a candid discussion with these individuals about how the regime's leadership first acted in a democratic way and later curtailed the deceitful proceedings after realizing they were not playing out in its favour, they stated that the EPRDF leadership, internally, had always held that the country was not ready for democratization, and the only reason why the regime decided to proceed with the open democratic climate that it suddenly introduced was, essentially, because it was "testing the waters", as the coalition's leadership termed it.

According to these individuals, the EPRDF believed that people in rural Ethiopia, who comprised more than 80 per cent of the total population of the country, would vote in support of the regime and that the only difficulty it probably faced might be limited to the urban centres, which the EPRDF had long considered opposition strongholds. Such initial guesses by the leadership, however, came out as utter miscalculations, which therefore had to be corrected. The corrective measures, unfortunately, included the killing of hundreds of protesters by the security forces as the authoritarian regime attempted to control the post-electoral violence, which emerged mainly in the capital, Addis Ababa (Human Rights Watch 2006).

After the conclusion of the election, with the EPRDF declared the "winner" and the post-election violence now controlled, one of the opposition coalitions, called Hibret (the UEDF), that had many parliamentary seats decided to join parliament. CUD leaders, who decided against entering parliament, were immediately jailed, however, and most spent up to two years in federal prisons (State Department 2006). Based on the views of an individual who was elected a member of the House of Representatives (though he declined to enter parliament) and who had also served as one of the most influential leaders of the CUD, spending almost two years as a political prisoner, the EPRDF jailed the majority of the leaders of the coalition and turned the CUD, with its electoral campaign touting national unity and redemption, into political irrelevance. Moreover, the regime successfully managed to further divide these imprisoned political leaders by using game tactics designed to create animosity between them while they were in prison cells.⁴ These divisive tactics, reminiscent of the prisoner's dilemma, eventually led to a situation in which one opposition leader could not trust the other even after they left prison. In fact, one feature that was witnessed after these jailed leaders were released from the TPLF's notorious prisons was that the magnanimity and camaraderie that had characterized the leaders of the CUD was completely replaced by political antagonism and open finger pointing between them. One of the leaders would give an interview and utilize it to criticize and attack a former colleague within the CUD, while one would even publish a book painting his contributions in golden colours but blaming "others" as traitors and collaborators with the "*woyane*",⁵ resulting in the CUD's downfall.

What such political developments following the 2005 national election show, basically, is, first, that the EPRDF learned that it does not have popular support except for the massive backing it enjoys in the Tigray regional state

and from ethnic Tigrayans and, second, it also believed that taking corrective measures against the flourishing opposition and its mass support was the only way to restore the calm that the coalition needed so much to advance its reforms and consolidate its grip on political power.

As a result of how the 2005 national election played out and how the regime coped against the challenging developments in the aftermath, the EPRDF made sure it now restored “calm” within the coalition’s leadership and among its powerful patrons spread across the Ethiopian federal arrangement, who had been serving the coalition in parallel to the centralist authoritarian party structure in place. The EPRDF also publicly came out as a reformed agent of developmental programmes, and the elite figures would add the term “developmental” to every possible position available within the ruling party structure – as was also being done with their economic programmes, discussed in the last chapter. Furthermore, the issue of democracy, according to their open propaganda items, would become something they would consider only after the country had embarked successfully on the coalition’s renewed efforts targeting economic growth.

Thus, the 2005 general election, for the EPRDF regime, signalled that, for the political elite to retain their dominance of political power, democracy and democratic demands were not questions that they would have to answer. The conclusion they arrived at in the end was, therefore, that the EPRDF’s leadership had to continue to rule only by reforming itself from time to time and addressing the political and economic challenges as they arose. Moreover, the regime also understood that, despite its massive work and relative success in creating the necessary environment of patronage and established success in installing a strong party structure, expanding its base of supporters by amassing new members, by millions (even requiring high school and college students to register as members), and having those members as agents of their new programmes were its only remaining options. Thus, the regime decided that the only option left as the EPRDF’s mode of operation was to come up with strategies for the successful implementation of these goals.

Critical juncture III: Zenawi’s death and the advent of the EPRDF’s “collective leadership”

The 2005 national election, which was one of the most pivotal events in the country’s contemporary politics as well as in the evolution of the TPLF-led EPRDF coalition, had come and gone. The end result of such a critical juncture, as already discussed, was the emergence of the ruling coalition as more dominant than it had been beforehand. Zenawi, a strongman who presided over two decades of the TPLF/EPRDF’s rule of the state, had also seen his power consolidate even further, to the extent that the country’s politics was considered a one-man piece of theatre. In every political juncture that students of Ethiopian politics refer to as a defining moment, Zenawi comes out stronger than he was ever before as well. Medhane Tadesse, in his

assessment of Zenawi's political rise irrespective of the challenges that the coalition that he led encountered from time to time, states:

The rise of Meles to a dominant and undisputed position in the Ethiopian state had far reaching political implications. It weakened the rest of the political forces within and outside the ruling party, decimated other centers of power and influence and immobilized the TPLF, the most organized political force in the post-1991 Ethiopian landscape. There is no doubt that the removal of the rather well-entrenched and adamant party leaders (in the aftermath of the division within TPLF) would give him the opportunity to seize the full reins of power and make a clean start in the affairs of the state. He tried hard to relocate his power base from Tigray and the TPLF to the Center and the EPRDF with some success. Thus, the progressive political ascendancy of Meles was paralleled by growing political strength at the Center. He created a centralized government and a party leader unified with the state making the party, the government of the day and the state one and the same. He promoted loyal bureaucrats than party loyalists [*sic*] which served to reinforce a clearly identifiable power pyramid. In doing this he created a power base independent of all the members of the ruling party.

(Tadesse 2012: 1)

Tadesse has a point, in that Zenawi had indeed successfully seized the trust and loyalty of the non-TPLF members of the ruling coalition. Nevertheless, I disagree with the claim about the relocation of the centre of power from the TPLF elites in Tigray to the EPRDF headquarters in Addis Ababa, in the absence of credible evidence showing the growth of political power, whether in the leadership of the ANDM, OPDO, or the SEPDM. Indeed, power was mainly concentrated in the hands of the TPLF leaders. Nonetheless, Tadesse's piece shows that the prime minister, who led the country and the EPRDF coalition with an iron fist for two decades, was a real political genius in asserting his political power and in destroying opposition to his way of doing things, from within his party or from the coalition he single-handedly managed.

In the aftermath of the 2005 general election, Zenawi also came to the conclusion that, if the EPRDF carried on without a sizeable public support base, the coalition would struggle in its ambition of retaining its hold on political power. Thus, the ruling coalition, according to him, had to come prepared with a new strategy of recruiting millions of new members, and each political party within the coalition, as well as the affiliated parties spread across the so called "developing regional states", would be tasked with expanding their support bases. According to interviewee 27, an individual who had worked in the EPRDF headquarters in Addis Ababa and was a long-time member of the ANDM, the new memorandum distributed was scary, to say the least. The individual stated,

Mr Meles Zenawi and his advisors debated what the new strategy of expanding our member base should be. After a long debate they decided that constituting new youth associations and creating pilot job fairs and opportunities with loan programmes would be able to attract the unemployed youth that we at the EPRDF had considered “the main support the opposition enjoyed”.⁶

These plans targeted all urban centres, as the strategy mainly focused on regional state capitals and Addis Ababa. Success came quickly, and each group of youth associations would be given a day or two of lectures about the new and improved programmes of the EPRDF and then would be “invited” to become party members “in line with their ethnic origins”. The interviewee continued, “This rapid success would be immediately followed by what is famously known as the ‘*anid le’amist*’ phenomenon, which, even further, created millions of new patrons to the system that the ruling coalition had created.”

As we recall from the discussion of how the EPRDF’s successful system of patronage resulted in its domination of the ethnic federal setting, and thus any potential electoral challenges, the new structure, known as *anid le’amist*, reinforced even further the already functioning mechanism of the survivalist EPRDF’s manipulation of the federal arrangement and its patronage system. In the earlier discussions of electoral manipulations by the EPRDF, it was also evident that the 2010 national elections led to a sweeping “victory” for the ruling coalition, as it claimed to have won 99.6 per cent of parliamentary seats. Given such successes on the part of the coalition and the rising power of its manipulative leader, the regime continued its grip on political power, and its members could be assured that, as long as the EPRDF stayed in power, they would continue to enjoy the privileges that came from associating with the coalition.

A unique problem arrived in the middle of 2012, however, when it became clear that the health of the prime minister was deteriorating, as a result of health complications that remain an EPRDF secret and a mystery to the rest of the Ethiopian public. After a series of unsubstantiated rumours in the social media sphere and the regime’s unsuccessful attempts to calm the situation about the whereabouts and health conditions of Zenawi, who was failing to appear at state events or in the media, it was an opposition outlet known as ESAT (Ethiopian Satellite Television and Radio) that broke the news of the death of the prime minister, who had ruled the country for more than 21 years, in its broadcast on July 30, 2017.⁷

The ruling coalition, visibly confused and devoid of any agreed media strategies, restrained from admitting and announcing their leader’s death until August 21, 2012, when state television’s early morning broadcast declared the passing away of the “dear” leader in a sudden death, while also confirming that he had indeed been battling an unnamed sickness for over two years.⁸ The issues of the political succession, the fate of the country, and the problems

facing the ruling coalition then created a new critical juncture that would redefine the course of the country afresh.

The political leadership of the regime, in deep mourning at the death of Zenawi, and not discussing the future of the state but, rather, how to maintain the legacies of the departed leader, eventually started tackling one of the most challenging times in the history of the EPRDF's rule. The political succession issue should have been resolved routinely, given the constitution's provision for the deputy prime minister to assume the top position. Regardless, the EPRDF and its leadership stayed silent, and the country would remain without a head of government until the deputy prime minister, Hailemariam Desalegn, was sworn in on September 21, 2012,⁹ as only the second prime minister of the country since 1995, after an emergency meeting called by parliament. With the arrival of the newly sworn in prime minister on the political scene, filling the major gap left by Zenawi's death, the ruling elite started its propaganda about the emergence of collective leadership, with the appointment of a number of deputy prime ministers serving as advisors to the new prime minister while also managing certain Cabinet portfolios.

A member of the OPDO top leadership and formerly a youth political association leader told me that

the prime minister not only is usually bypassed by TPLF advisors, in most of the administrative issues that the EPRDF encounters, but most within the party leadership in Addis Ababa and across the regional states also believe that he does not even receive intelligence briefings and vital reports from certain ministerial offices and state-controlled enterprises. Even if he does receive any briefings, they will only tell him a minimal amount of information.¹⁰

The individual added that most such tasks were, instead, overseen by those deputizing for Desalegn. Moreover, posters of the late prime minister, in a manner reminiscent of North Korea's former and current leaders, were visible across the country, and the EPRDF's programmes all spoke about implementing the visions of the late dear leader. In the words of *The Economist* (2013), "His party is trying to wring as much legitimacy as possible from his legacy. It may be too early to speak of a post-Meles era – even in death he is the country's most visible politician."

Evidently, Desalegn and his comrades within the EPRDF were declaring not only their intention to lead the nation by keeping the legacies and visions of the late leader intact but also the fact that they had emerged out of the crisis as one, depicting their usual success in coming out of any crisis stronger. And that, from what we have already seen in the discussions of the first two critical junctures, has become part of the political culture within the ruling coalition: that it will come out of any crisis stronger. As many of my respondents explained, such strength was also attributed to the EPRDF's strong party

discipline across all levels of its structure. The EPRDF may have been a coalition, but it functioned as a single political party.

Ultimately, the death of Zenawi never led to the breaking out of any protests or unrest across the country, and the EPRDF's resolve in capitalizing on the "vision of the late leader" as a new source of legitimacy reinforced its efforts regarding the ideals they referred to as "collective leadership", which resulted in continuing effective control of the state. The Ethiopian public in general, confused and limited to following the new developments from television screens and over the radio waves, coming mostly from exiled media sources such as ESAT, also understood that – in the absence of a formidable political alternative, thanks to the EPRDF's effective obliteration of the opposition – observing how the post-Zenawi era unfolded in the country and hoping for a calming political atmosphere were the only hope and option available.

Interestingly, however, the TPLF, which had dominated the EPRDF for over two decades, had to hastily reassert its dominance by making some political moves that further strengthened its control. Nine days before the new prime minister was sworn in, on September 12, 2012, the TPLF, which had always controlled the security apparatus, ranging from the military to the intelligence forces and the federal police, appointed no fewer than 37 new generals all on the same day.¹¹

According to an interviewee, the TPLF had already understood that relying on the EPRDF party structure and elites at the regional level, through patron–client relations spread across the ethnic federal arrangement, might not be sustainable for much longer. Therefore, strengthening its grip on the military would become an alternative option. What it is essential for us to understand, however, is that throughout the TPLF-led EPRDF's tenure in the country the ruling elite, seemingly diverse but highly controlled by the TPLF, had survived the challenges that they faced by abiding by party discipline and through their sheer desire to succeed with their survivalist approaches.

The sudden passing of Zenawi and the vulnerable political climate that he left behind are now long gone, but the basic concerns of the general populace, in terms of the lack of prospects for democratization and fears over what might come out of the ruling coalition, lingered. The 2015 general election would arrive, and the EPRDF "improved" its control of the legislative assembly from what the regime had claimed to have won in 2010 (99.6 per cent) to now winning 100 per cent of the votes. As indicated above, the fears of the TPLF in considering the patronage networks enable by the ethnic federal arrangement as unsustainable became a reality when the question of the identity of societies from the southern and western Tigray regions, which had been forcefully demarcated as part of Tigray region, emerged when they wanted to reclaim their Amhara identity and reunite with the Amhara regional state, becoming a new challenge that initiated murmurings among the Amhara and eventually protests ensued. The youth of the Oromo, an ethnic group arguably considered the largest in the country, also demanded fairness and equality in

the economic and political spheres of the Ethiopian state, while additionally opposing what they considered an illegal master plan to expand the city limits of Addis Ababa.

These questions that emerged from the two most populous regions and ethnic groups led to a massive eruption of unrest across the two largest regional states, the Amhara and Oromia regions. The majority of the political elite from the two political parties that administered Oromia and Amhara regional states (OPDO and the ANDM, respectively) also, in the eyes of many observers and students of Ethiopian politics, for the first time ever in the history of the EPRDF, sided with the people's demands in their respective states. This was now a new challenge for the TPLF-led EPRDF coalition. A state of emergency was declared by Hailemariam Desalegn's government, and the deployment of troops across the country in massive numbers initially seemed to have quelled the rampant violence, which had now dominated the Ethiopian political scene since 2016. This impression would be short-lived, however.

Critical juncture IV: popular protests, political change, a reformed EPRDF

Despite the magnitude of the challenges testing the TPLF-led EPRDF's rule, the coalition remained strong and resilient in overcoming these trials. Nevertheless, the Ethiopian state remained poor and unequal, with its political sphere constituting a ticking time bomb that would endanger the future of the country unless the most needed reforms were put in place. In this regard, the resultant political developments, mainly popular protests (from 2016 until early 2018), no matter how damaging they were to the economy, are considered a blessing in disguise as they pushed the EPRDF towards political reforms. These protests, which challenged the viability of the ethnic federal model because of the evolving questions of identity and the demands for equality and fairness, were heard across the greater Oromia and Amhara regions, and similar sentiments echoed across the country, such as the quest for statehood pursued by the Sidama and Wolayta groups. The raging protesters also openly moved against the TPLF's dominance of the ruling coalition as well as the country's politics.

How such developments play out in the long run will have a great bearing on how comparative politics researchers look at the Ethiopian case moving forward. And this remains true despite the early promises indicating a potential democratic breakthrough, which comes with its own sets of challenges. Some initial observations also suggest that the ways in which the EPRDF managed the political turmoil before the political reforms seemed to have ensured another classic episode of its successful survival strategy, ensuring it would stay in power. It is important to note, however, that the difference is that this classic case of the political survival of the coalition emerged with the political defeat of the TPLF, the party that had dominated the

coalition for so long. Such a change within the EPRDF after the 2018 political change therefore transformed the liberation front into being just one equal member of the coalition. The TPLF retreated away from Ethiopia's political centre and started to rebuild its political power by concentrating its political energies through stationing itself in Tigray, training tens of thousands of militias, and obstructing reforms enacted by the new prime minister, Abiy Ahmed Ali.

These political developments present two important takeaways with respect to contemporary Ethiopian politics. First, the ethnic federal arrangement and the subsequent emergence of the institutional manipulations of the EPRDF elite were effective in serving the coalition's survivalist agenda. Hence, even after the TPLF had been politically defeated, the EPRDF coalition, now dominated by formerly marginalized Oromo and Amhara elites, still relies on such a setting to control the state. This cannot occur without any challenges, however, which the next chapter attempts to explain. Second, it is now clear that diverse groups in the country (especially the largest ones, such as the Amhara and Oromos) and the ruling elite have now understood that the EPRDF's status quo was not sustainable. As a result, the takeaway becomes that the newly emerged leaders of the EPRDF coalition, with their understanding of the problems within the federal setting, the re-emergence of questions of political and economic inequality, and questions of identity challenging the federal setting, gave way to new reformist elites eager to address these challenges. Given that such issues have been the ever-present questions of the country's citizenry, the elites also seem to have understood that the challenges necessitate the adoption of new and creative political solutions. For this to occur, the newly emerging Oromo and Amhara political elites have to recognize the need for democratic opening and the participation of all opposition parties in the new political reality that they are now in charge of.

From the political direction, the new regime led by Abiy Ahmed has attempted to address the severe divisions and animosity, evident through the political and ethnic violence that erupted across the border villages and districts between the Somali regional state and Oromia, and within Southern region, the Benishangul-Gumuz region, the Amhara region, and other parts of the country. With recurrent violence continuing to challenge the new EPRDF, the Ethiopian state entered a sad chapter of communal and ethnic conflicts. As a result of a series of conflicts across such districts located across administrative boundaries, it has also been estimated that a few million Ethiopians were internally displaced.¹² Of course, this is without looking deeply into what was happening in all the other regional states, especially Tigray, a region that had been calm but was administered by the TPLF, which continued to challenge the work of the reformist leaders of the EPRDF coalition that it had dominated for so long.

Nonetheless, the coalition's new leader, Abiy Ahmed, successfully adjusted the coalition's political contours and achieved reforms that were considered beyond political survival. These successes can be evaluated only when

important steps towards full-fledged political and economic reforms have been realized and the manner of their implementation is fully explained. Unfortunately, while the country was undergoing reforms, the continued violence and challenges coming from the TPLF became unsettling to the new EPRDF elites. The country's experience with ethnic strife and violence and questions directed at the ruling coalition has also forced the regime to unremittingly tout the talk of reform and political change, and, for the most part, its leaders walked the talk. This was evident when the regime started its reforms by releasing long-held political prisoners, adopting conciliatory projects centred on the promotion of Ethiopian unity, and introducing programmes focused on conflict resolution mechanisms.

In such a pivotal transitional period, the two newly dominant members of the EPRDF's coalition, the ANDM and OPDO, which had already changed their names to the ADP and the ODP, respectively (as they had sided with the respective state-based movements of popular resentment against the TPLF's dominance of the state), eventually succeeded in establishing a political level playing field within the coalition. In so doing, their political elites were able to establish a more inclusive and participatory framework by bringing into the fold the most underserved and marginalized political groups, which the TPLF-led coalition used to refer as affiliate parties from "developing regions". Eventually, the new leadership of the coalition dissolved the EPRDF in December 2019 and created a nationally unified party known as the Prosperity Party, under the leadership of the prime minister, Abiy Ahmed.¹³ The next chapter discusses the anatomy of the political change, the reforms introduced, how the Prosperity Party came about, the continued ethnic violence, the challenging road ahead, and a conflict that broke out between the TPLF and the federal government led by Abiy Ahmed, which referred to the fighting as a law enforcement operation.

Conclusion

The ruling coalition's success in its survival amid recurring challenges show that co-opted elites, a marginalized bureaucracy, and a federal arrangement that enabled party-serving patronage could indeed achieve authoritarian survival. Nevertheless, in light of the discussions of the EPRDF's politics of survival, the political change in 2018 shows that the TPLF's dominance of the coalition's politics is over and, instead, an equal playing field within the country has emerged. Questions remain, however, as to whether this renewed commitment to reforms, and calls for national reconciliation coming from the new incumbents, the PP, will translate into the creation of a level playing field for the political opposition as well. With many opposition political parties still trying to organize anew and the ethnic polarization that is the result of the ethnic federal arrangement making their political operations challenging, any hopes that we will witness democratization in Ethiopia come solely from

the commitment of the reform leaders who have emerged in the post-2018 political era.

The determination of political leaders across all levels of government in Ethiopia to heed the reform agenda of the new national party that has replaced the now defunct EPRDF thus faces a major test. Certainly, time will tell how far the reforms might travel in the new political reality that emerged after what the new leaders called a law enforcement operation that led to the demise of the TPLF's political organization. Given the commitment to the democratization of Ethiopia that is being witnessed from these new leaders of the Prosperity Party, however, it will not be surprising if they reintroduce the long-abandoned democratization efforts in general. Regardless, it is important to reiterate that these recent political developments in the country, and how they play out in the long term, therefore remain an open question for future research. But one thing is clear. The EPRDF's successive trajectories of political survival ended as a result of popular protests and internal revolts led by the Amhara and Oromo leaders of their now defunct EPRDF coalition.

Notes

- 1 The extended interview with interviewee 29 took place on March 28, 2017, in Atlanta, Georgia, and a subsequent telephone interview took place on April 12.
- 2 The interviewee was interview subject 29. See above endnote.
- 3 Dr Negasso Gidada was the first president of federal Ethiopia after Meles Zenawi, who had served as the president of the provisional government and later would become the head of state in a parliamentary and federal Ethiopia.
- 4 The interview with interviewee 32 occurred in Washington, DC, on April 7, 2017.
- 5 “*Woyane*” is a word in the Tigrinya language that is commonly used in Ethiopian politics to describe those leaders and supporters of the TPLF.
- 6 The interview with respondent 27 was conducted via email exchanges as well as telephone conversations on February 28 and March 4, 2017.
- 7 The ESAT radio report of Zenawi's death can be accessed here: www.youtube.com/watch?v=bBflmpEG7v0.
- 8 The state TV report of Zenawi's death can be accessed here: www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q8b1H78rz3Y.
- 9 The swearing in of the new prime minister can be accessed here: www.youtube.com/watch?v=VDQO00Vij4g.
- 10 The interview with individual 49 was conducted on May 28, 2017, in Silver Spring, Maryland, and a telephone conversation was held the next day.
- 11 The TPLF leadership's decision to promote its lower-level military leaders, mostly ethnic Tigrayans, before the new prime minister had even been sworn in is explained on a party-affiliated news site: see Berhane (2012).
- 12 To learn more about the displacement of the Oromos, see Jeffrey (2017).
- 13 For information on the establishment of the Prosperity Party and what it means for Ethiopia, see *Washington Post* (2019); also see Gedamu (2019).

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10 A defunct EPRDF, the emergence of the Prosperity Party, and the fall of the TPLF

Introduction

Across most democracies, parliamentary governments struggle with the issue of keeping political coalitions intact, as politically unstable administrations have become increasingly challenging to democracy (Neuberger 2020). Sadly, this is true whether such states are constructed as federal or unitary systems. Ethiopia, under the long-resilient EPRDF coalition, which ruled it for some 28 years, remains an anomaly, however. The reason for this is that, although the ruling coalition was created as a political conglomeration of four parties, it mostly functioned as one party, with tight discipline for its members and no room for defections – a fact that, essentially, made it a lone political force that would do anything for its survival. Moreover, for much of its existence, the coalition was tightly controlled by one of its political parties (the TPLF), which also exerted dominance over all the country's security frameworks, which were more political than just serving what they were designed to achieve – namely protecting state sovereignty. In the case of Ethiopia, what is more surprising, however, is that the TPLF, which had a monopoly hold on the EPRDF coalition, never went through any form of transformation to become a reformed political party, even after it achieved power in 1991. The TPLF, as its name indicates, was an ethnic political organization formed to function as a liberation front. And, when it lost political power at the centre in 2018 and until its demise fully materialized in late 2020 (after a war it launched against the federal government), it remained as a liberation front. Such a fact makes Ethiopia, which is the second most populous nation in Africa, the only country to have been administered by an unreformed liberation front for more than a quarter of a century.

For comparison's sake, let us look at the EPLF, which fought against Ethiopia's military regime with a goal of liberating Eritrea following a military victory, and eventually succeeded with its goal of ensuring Eritrea's secession in 1993. Once the goal had been achieved, the EPLF then changed its name to the Popular Front for Democracy and Justice (Connell 2001). Such a reality, especially with regard to the TPLF, indeed begs more questions. And, as this chapter's discussions will later show, it can be argued that the fact the TPLF remained a liberation front was not without reason.

The EPRDF remained in power for so long not because its reign was popular with the ruled, nor because it had a broad constituency of ethnic groups and societies that considered the coalition as a legitimate caretaker or protector of their interests. It did so because it was effective in its exploitation of a federal arrangement it designed itself for its survival ambitions. As broadly discussed in the last few chapters, the Ethiopian bureaucracy mostly served the EPRDF's political interests, the regional states did enjoyed no independence in the policy formulation and implementation processes serving their administrations and constituencies' interests, and political elites, with the exception of Tigrayan leaders, were highly co-opted servants of a coalition that served the interests of only one political group: the TPLF.

Certainly, this political reality was not sustainable but tenuous and a ticking time bomb, set to unravel at some point. As a result, demands for political freedoms, protests asking for the release of unjustly jailed political prisoners, questions of economic equality, and – in some parts of the federation – demands to reclaim the persecuted identities of groups (massive areas had been taken away by the TPLF and included in the Tigray regional state) from what were, legally and historically, Amhara heartlands had already gained momentum in the years and months before 2016. The EPRDF, under the leadership of its chairman and the country's prime minister for the last six years before 2018, Hailemariam Desalegn, at first tried to subdue the repeated massive protests with force. Although these attempts were initially successful, the administration was not able to maintain the country's stability for long. In November and December 2017, therefore, the EPRDF had one of its historic meetings that could last a few weeks, or even months – about 17 days, in this case – which was not surprising given that the coalition's elites were well known for conducting highly protracted meetings. In this meeting, for the first time ever, however, the TPLF elites understood that their once obedient Amhara and Oromo partners in the coalition had changed course and were echoing the sentiments of the resistance coming from the raging citizenry. From such a meeting, therefore, important decisions were made that were not in the interests of the TPLF. Nonetheless, from what started with this meeting, to evaluate and possibly address the popular discontent that was exhibited throughout the protests seen over the last couple of years before 2017, and the decisions reached as a result of the internal revolt from within the EPRDF, Ethiopia's recent political fortunes changed once and for all.

Mass protests for political change

Ever since 1991 ethnicity had been “declared the ideological basis of political organization and administration” of the Ethiopian state ruled by the EPRDF coalition (Abbink 1997: 159). Hence, any legitimate or corrupt enactment of policies was analysed and interpreted in ethnocentric ways. Therefore, when the city administration of Addis Ababa, which is a political unit that has been tightly controlled by the federal government, decided to

expand its boundaries for the sake of a new city master plan that was touted to assist the natural growth of the capital city, ethnic Oromo youth from the surrounding suburbs staged huge protests. In a series of massive protests, demonstrators demanded an immediate halt to the city's plans to widen its boundaries. The protesters claimed that previous expansions or development works around Addis Ababa and its suburbs, which are part of the Oromia region, had led to the uprooting of Oromo farmers from their farmlands, with little compensation being paid to them (Záhořík 2017). The challenge the EPRDF encountered due to protests following the announcement of the Addis Ababa master plan was not a new political development, however, but a continuation of societal suffering that was also demonstrated via damaging events pertaining to the land grab phenomenon following the 2005 general election, which also led to massive humanitarian distress. As a detailed report by Endalk Chala indicates,

Since the highly contested 2005 national election forceful evictions and urban land grabbing have become frequent in Addis and its environs, opposition groups say. The city's rapid growth has resulted in increasing pressure to convert rural land for industrial, housing or other urban use.
(Chala 2015)

Such incidents, with respect to land grabs, were also in part fuelled by hugely inflated land prices that mostly benefited the political elite, who took land holdings from peasants and sold them for a profit – actions that were especially taken by corrupt leaders of the TPLF (Mengistu & van Dijk 2018). Hence, rising popular tensions and then a series of demonstrations in the cities surrounding Addis Ababa had been widely predicted.

Almost a year after the Oromo protests began, Amharas in the historic city of Gondar, which is one of the largest cities in the Amhara regional state, also emerged with a protest that was unlike anything Ethiopia had experienced for a long time. The city of Gondar was once a revered capital of Ethiopia itself, and its people are known for important historical roles in the making and unmaking of political regimes in the country's long history. The reasons for the protest that took place starting on August 31, 2016, in Gondar were particularly tied to an unprecedented event that had occurred a few days earlier: the Tigray region police force's failed operation to arrest members of the Welkait Amhara Identity Committee. The committee had been formed by Welkait Amharas, from what is a historically Amhara area, forcefully annexed (without any consultations) and included in the Tigray regional state during the post-1991 era when the country was governed under the Transitional Charter. Thus, illegal annexations of land occurred years before the current ethnic federal constitution was even ratified. Such communities in the Welkait, Tegede, and Telemt areas also claim to have suffered from broad forms of discrimination, been barred from speaking in Amharic, and been urged to act and live like Tigrayans, which were all unacceptable to them.

Hence, the committee that they had organized demanded that their land and people be included once more in the Amhara region, with which they culturally, ethnically, and linguistically identified. This indeed was unacceptable for the Tigrayan elites as well. It was for this reason that the TPLF sent its police forces to Gondar to arrest some of the members of the Welkait Amhara Identity Committee. Members of the committee, led by a former military colonel, Demeke Zewdu, had no choice but to exchange gunshots, defend themselves, and repel the arrest attempt by Tigrayan forces. For the Amhara regional state and its formerly co-opted elites, there was also no option left but to side with the attacked identity committee, which identified with the region that they were in charge of. Hence, subsequent attempts by the TPLF to get the members of the committee extradited to Tigray region failed, as the Amhara elites suddenly became protective of the Amhara public interest and the sovereignty of the regional state they administered.

During the late summer of 2016, therefore, much attention was given to what had been occurring in the city of Gondar and its surroundings. The Amhara, who were mostly known for being supportive of the national unity of Ethiopians, then emerged for the first time with ethno-nationalistic sentiments of their own. Thus the famous protest from Gondar became a tipping point for the unravelling of Ethiopia. In this protest, which was well planned and orchestrated, the Amhara youth showed their solidarity with Oromo protests for political and economic justice. The event signalled that the country's two largest groups and their elites, who accounted for almost 65 per cent of the population and who had not seen eye to eye for many decades because of the political narratives of ethnic oppression that pitted them against one another, were finally coming to their senses. A senior political leader of the Amhara told me,

For so long, we had been politically influenced, dominated, and controlled by the country's security and intelligence services, which were only serving TPLF's interest. We had no room to manoeuvre when it came to opposing certain policies or promoting any political or economic plans for the region we administered. In fact, we always feared for our lives every time we suggested something that was not in the interest of the TPLF leaders. We knew that our people were one of the most oppressed groups over the last 27 years if not the most affected; and, unfortunately, we were nothing but the instruments of that oppression. For sure, it was a while since we recognized the anti-Amhara ethnic oppression and were saddened by the suffering directed against the Amhara due to false and divisive narratives sown and spread by TPLF and other ethno-nationalist forces that subscribed to the old propaganda of ethnic oppression of Ethiopians in the hands of the Amhara elites. But again, for so long, we were not able to do anything about it. Even when the Amhara were forcefully displaced, massacred and their properties were taken away for no reason but for residing in regions other than the Amhara region, we

could not protect them, as the federal arrangement was designed and implemented in such a way that minorities and individuals who resided in regions where they were not the majority did not enjoy the lawful protection of their rights. We were therefore pained to see such events unfold and were waiting for opportunities to emerge. Hence, what transpired in Gondar in the summer of 2016 was a blessing in disguise for us, as it opened our eyes, and it felt that for the first time that the people were now openly demanding and expecting us to do something about it, and that they would stand on our side no matter what. Since that day, we have become ready to compensate our people and country by departing from the years of open subjugation to TPLF. The partnership that emerged amongst Oromo and Amhara elites were therefore what we had planned and hoped to emerge since the protest started. Luckily for the country, we were very successful and were able to further assert our newfound confidence and political influence in the 17-day-long meeting from December 2017, which we used to make strides towards a political change that eventually arrived in early 2018.¹

Following the unrest in Gondar, which also unleashed a new partnership between the political elites of the country's two largest groups, what then happened within the EPRDF's now fragile coalition was that its elites slowly, but surely, started to agree that the old status quo was not sustainable and that political change was inevitable (Aalen 2020; Mekonnen 2019). The increasingly active and role-playing social media (mostly on Facebook) scene among Ethiopian activists, based in the diaspora across the world, also got more involved and gave the Amhara and Oromo political elites and the raging youth of the country further momentum in pursuing the struggle for political change (Abebe 2020). With demonstrations against TPLF dominance and the EPRDF's rule growing nationwide and the internal revolt within the coalition soaring even further in the face of growing elite defiance of the regime, what occurred on February 15, 2018, showed that the nationwide popular movement had reached its climax. On this date the prime minister, Hailemariam Desalegn, after leaving a closed-door EPRDF meeting, immediately entered his office, where secretly arranged but surprised journalists from a few of the country's major public media outlets were waiting. Desalegn then announced his resignation, while promising to remain in office to allow for a peaceful transition of political power (Fakude 2019). In his resignation speech, the premier, who had served for six years until then, declared, "Unrest and a political crisis have led to the loss of lives and displacement of many ... I see my resignation as vital in the bid to carry out reforms that would lead to sustainable peace and democracy" (BBC 2018).

According to the Amhara political leader I mentioned earlier, the TPLF's leaders were never aware of the prime minister's pre-planned resignation speech. Hence, they were surprised but also baffled that an individual who they considered was serving their interest and who they thought was an ally

would do this without their approval. In particular, they were dismayed that, in his speech, he also admitted his administration's failure to maintain the rule of law and protect civilians across the country and the inability of the government to contain the growing ethnic unrest, which had led to the large-scale displacement of peoples.

The rise of Abiy Ahmed and Demeke Mekonnen

Following the surprising resignation of Desalegn, what then followed was the natural question as to who was going to replace him. Given that the longest-serving leader of the EPRDF was Meles Zenawi, who had also doubled as the TPLF's chairman, and given that Desalegn was the second longest-serving chair of the EPRDF, and also doubled as chairman of the politically weakest member of the coalition, the SEPDM, the next leader to emerge was supposed to be, and largely expected to be, from the Amhara or Oromo elites of the coalition. Even more naturally, the deputy prime minister, Demeke Mekonnen, who did not resign but was also believed to have had the support of Desalegn, was expected to be the next leader of the coalition, and therefore Ethiopia's prime minister. The rise of ethno-nationalism, rising ethnic-polarization, and divisive political narratives that targeted the Amhara elites, however, meant that the safer and more appealing option would be to appoint one of the two young and rising political figures among the then OPDO: Lemma Megersa, the party's chair, and his deputy, Abiy Ahmed Ali. What then transpired was yet another dramatic political development. In the words of a former Oromo youth leader, who is still a major political figure in the Oromia region,

Oromos had been marginalized for centuries, and, if the popular protests that happened in the last few years were any indication, it was time for an Oromo leader of Ethiopia who would be able to appeal to the masses in our region and the country. Our people expected it, and our leaders also wanted it the most. Hence, given that our party's [OPDO] leader, Lemma Megersa, was not a member of parliament, it was important for us to call an emergency meeting of the party and to announce a new chair, who happened to be a member of the country's House of Representatives, a right that entitles the individual to become a prime minister. What was great was that Lemma was so courageous – just like Hailemariam Desalegn was in February – in relinquishing his chairmanship and giving it instead to Abiy Ahmed. Therefore, once Abiy Ahmed had been elected chair of our party and announced in our media, and given that Demeke Mekonnen and the Amhara leaders were supportive of the move, our political exercises proved to be very effective, as what we did ensured that the former becomes the new prime minister and the first Oromo leader of the country in modern times and the latter becomes his deputy premier, which means continuing in his current position in the coalition's leadership and the country's.²

What is interesting with the above interviewee and the Amhara leader mentioned earlier was that both individuals had claimed marginalization of their groups and that their parties were aspiring to become the most influential political organizations that would oversee the political transition after Desalegn's resignation. Nonetheless, this was not surprising at all, as, in today's Ethiopia, the issue is about who has more grievances, which even became a competition of sorts. Indeed, it is also indicative of the ever-present competition between Amhara and Oromo political elites for political influence, which continues to this day.

In public, however, both groups' elites showed partnership and unity, which was crucial if they were to further limit whatever remained of the TPLF's political influence and to deter its ability to reorganize itself at the political centre and possibly make an effort at a comeback at some stage. Hence, Amhara and Oromo leaders, led by Demeke Mekonnen and Abiy Ahmed, respectively, and supported by their deputies in their respective organizations, Gedu Andargachew and Lemma Megersa, were able to continue touting national unity. Oromo leaders even famously declared that there was no ethnic oppression in the history of Ethiopia, but what was prevalent was class oppression, reflecting the ruling elites who had been in charge in the past.³

As a result of the alliance between the elites from these two groups, therefore, the new political narratives of the EPRDF, a coalition that saw the continually dwindling role and influence of the TPLF, started to change. As a consequence, the political atmosphere changed from that of the TPLF's narratives, saying how it had ushered in a new era of freedom for the country thanks to the sacrifices its soldiers had made during the struggle against the military regime, to the need for national unity and working towards prosperity. When it comes to what in particular transpired when the TPLF came to power and how it continued to rule, Terrence Lyons explains it succinctly:

Ethiopian politics for nearly thirty years have been shaped by how the TPLF won the protracted civil war in 1991 and how the legacies of that war were linked to the mechanisms through which the EPRDF ruled. Civil wars that end in rebel victory generally follow distinct war to peace transitions. The transition in Ethiopia, as well as in cases such as Uganda and Rwanda, emphasized power consolidation rather than power sharing and focused on transforming the armed insurgent group into an authoritarian political party.

(Lyons 2019: 4)

Lyons also argues that "these legacies continue to shape reform efforts in 2018", however, which I disagree with given that what has thus far transpired is not reminiscent of the post-war transitions in Ethiopia's past that he mentions (including the TPLF's rise to political power). Instead, what followed was a series of reform efforts that had been going through different phases of

trials in connection with the rising danger coming from ethno-nationalist organizations and their elites, who had been undermining the reform agenda of those who replaced the TPLF (Lyons 2019: 5). Certainly, the current leaders were not very effective in many respects, especially with regard to ensuring peace and stability in the country. But some of the reasons for the incompetence witnessed after the political change will be discussed later.

Nonetheless, as indicated earlier, the fact that OPDO had prepared its new chairman to become a prime minister and that the Amhara elites of the coalition approved it meant that, when the EPRDF convened to select its new leader, Abiy Ahmed would be elected the new leader of the coalition by receiving all the votes coming from his party and the Amhara members of the coalition, and also by garnering some votes from the SEPDM, the party of the south's central committee. Hence, for the first time, a new EPRDF leader was elected without unanimous support, as the TPLF members voted for the candidate from the SEPDM even though only handful of his own party members had voted for him. Hence, it is important to note that, even by splitting their votes for Abiy Ahmed and Shiferaw Shigute, his main competition, SEPDM members also played an important role in ensuring the emergence of Abiy, the most consequential political leader of recent generations in the country. On April 1, 2018, therefore, Abiy Ahmed was sworn in as the fourth premier of Ethiopia since the fall of the military regime in 1991 and the third prime minister since the country adopted a parliamentary system in 1995. In his acceptance speech in front of parliament, Abiy then made one of the most momentous speeches by an Ethiopian leader, and one that set a new path for the country. His translated speech reads, in part:

On this historical day, as our country, Ethiopia makes a peaceful transfer of power in accordance with its governance system, I would like to express the unique pride I feel to be standing before this august house and make this speech. [...]

Ethiopia is a country of fertile wombs. It has produced many children that strive relentlessly out of a great spirit of love for the country. Its children strongly aspire and strive tirelessly to return the country to its past glory; and to ensure that the peace and security of its people is protected, and that prosperity is extended to all of its citizens without any discrimination. [...]

In a democratic system, the government allow citizens to express their ideas freely without any fear. The right of citizens for free movement cannot be built without the leadership, support, and open-heartedness of government. Therefore, the government will work with great resolve so that the free and peaceful movement of citizens is respected (not obstructed). [...]

[T]he democracy that we yearn for cannot become a reality. In democratic governance, the supremacy of the law needs to be established. One

wisdom that we need not forget while trying to ensure the supremacy of the law is that our people are not looking simply for the presence [of] laws but also the realization of justice. The enforcement of the law need not be divorced from justice. What our people are striving for isn't a dry law but rather a system of laws conceived within justice, that stands for justice. What the people are looking for are neutral and non-partisan law enforcement officers that are loyal to the law and those that jealously guard the rights of citizens.

The law must rule us all equitably. When it does, the law protects for all of us the dignity that emanates from our humanity. By comprehending this truth, we shall fill the gap in the administration of justice by making the necessary reforms (improvements) so that democracy will flourish in our country; so that freedom and justice shall reign; so that the supremacy of the law becomes a reality.

For peace, the foundation is justice. Peace is not the absence of conflict. Peace is an inviolable unity built on our common understandings. Peace is our confidence in each other. Peace is our common journey that continued to this day through our coming together in unity. Peace is our path and our goal that allows us to solve disagreements and conflicts in a civilized manner.⁴

As can be seen above, this speech, which was delivered on the floor of House of Representatives, was extraordinary, and the first of its kind in the country's contemporary history. What also made the new premier's speech well received was the acknowledgement he noted and the apology he extended to Ethiopians who had suffered from the TPLF-led coalition's abuse of political power in general and human rights violations in particular. Abiy Ahmed stated,

I ask a forgiveness from the bottom of my heart for the many advocates of freedom and justice and politicians and the many change-seeking youth whose lives were cut short before they were able to enjoy and have fun during the primes of their lives and for the many individuals and families who were exposed to both psychological and bodily trauma during the past many years.

(OPride.com 2018)

Here, what it is critical to note is that the new EPRDF elites in control of political power since April 2018 were also part of the old clique from the same coalition. The fact that the new leader of the coalition, Abiy Ahmed, requested such forgiveness became very popular among the public at large, however. Moreover, in spite of challenges the country continued to face, the new administration also walked the talk, beginning a series of breathtaking reforms that delighted the public.

Series of reforms and challenges

The most important political reforms were introduced in the first six months of Abiy Ahmed's tenure as the new prime minister of the country. In these few months alone, political prisoners were released en masse.⁵ The executive branch's Cabinet of ministers was introduced, 50 per cent of whom were women.⁶ The state of emergency imposed by the previous administration would be lifted. Individual political elites, especially the military generals, who were accused of massive corruption, were imprisoned (Reuters 2018c). With every media opportunity, the new prime minister and his allies continued to expose the crimes and misgivings of the old TPLF-led EPRDF and vowed to correct them under their new political tenure.

Most of all, the political narratives and propaganda in line with *abyotawi* (revolutionary) democracy were replaced by the issue of national unity and the promotion of the new philosophical ideals of *medemer*, a personal dogma of the new prime minister, which he sold as a home-grown philosophy that will take Ethiopia to its promised future of prosperity.⁷ In line with the new administration's goals of reinvigorating a weakened national unity, the country's parliament also created a national reconciliation commission, which was introduced as a mechanism "to maintain peace, justice, national unity and consensus and also reconciliation among Ethiopian peoples" (Oteng 2018). In addition, the administration has also introduced other far-reaching reform measures, undeniably allowing the political space to become bigger and the media sphere more relaxed.⁸

Throughout the weeks and months that these breathtaking reforms steps were being taken by the new administration, however, the country was also experiencing unrest in many of its regional administrations. Border conflicts among ethnic groups, the displacement of peoples, massacres and killings of ethnic groups based on their identities all continued unabated. The administration attempted to be more assertive in containing the violence, but it was still considered slow and ineffective. Nonetheless, its response to the violence was also a departure from its predecessors, as Abiy Ahmed himself paid numerous visits to see the displaced and share their concerns.

Unfortunately, however, one single problem, which was the unmaking of the new administration, was that of its management of the returning rebel armies that were formerly based in Eritrea. Among those rebel organizations that accepted the call for peaceful struggle by returning home was the Oromo Liberation Front, which returned to the country amid a huge welcoming fanfare from its supporting Oromo base in Addis Ababa and the Oromia region (Reuters 2018b). Sadly, as told by the OLF leaders and corroborated by media sources, the military wing of the organization, which was supposed to disarm and reintegrate into society on returning to the country, refused to do so; as a result, the new reality left the government no choice but to use military force with the goal of disarming the group and containing the violence it was causing (Xinhua 2018).

Ever since the refusal by the OLF army, which renamed itself as OLF-Shene, to disarm, violence in the administrative zones of Guji and Wollega in the Oromia region has gone on to become uncontrollable. The massive displacement of people, which was also occurring in multiple parts of the country, including the Benishangul-Gumuz region, continued unchecked. In fact, the rapid increase in the internal displacement of peoples even made Ethiopia a leading country in that category for some time (International Organization for Migration 2020). The new government led by Abiy Ahmed repeatedly blamed the TPLF, which at this point had isolated itself in Mekele, the capital of Tigray, for most of the violence and the toll it was taking on the country's citizenry.

The Eritrea surprise

Amid the ongoing reforms, the persistent security challenges, and the successive debates among the populace and political elites with regard to the future of political change in Ethiopia, one of the most important developments was the peace deal with Eritrea. What was famously known as the “no war – no peace” situation between the two countries, which had lasted for two decades, ended when their leaders signed a peace agreement that culminated the era of hostilities and ushered in a new era of peaceful coexistence and cooperation.⁹ Person-to-person cooperation started immediately. Successive meetings between Ethiopia's and Eritrea's leaders, Abiy Ahmed and President Isaias Afwerki, respectively, became common.

If a single prime reason can be given for the inability of the two countries to arrive at any agreement and resolve the crisis in the past, it was that of Ethiopia's refusal to surrender territories that it had been decided, by the border commission in the Algiers peace agreement of 2000, should be ceded to Eritrea (Lyons 2009). But, with promise of the new administration led by Abiy Ahmed to adhere to the agreement, the peace deal was finally signed. Moreover, the fact that the war that had broken out in 1998 was mainly attributable to political disagreements between former allies, the TPLF and the PFDJ, had also been the reason for Eritrea's refusal to engage with Ethiopia's previous attempts at peace overtures. As a result, Eritrea's leadership's understanding that the TPLF was no longer a political force in the country was a game changer. Indeed, cognizant of this fact, as his country was celebrating its Martyr's Day in 2018, President Isaias Afwerki stated,

The events and developments that have unfolded in our region in general and in Ethiopia in particular in the recent period warrant appropriate attention. Needless to stress, it is the Ethiopian people – forced as they were into adversarial ties of vertical polarization – who were the primary victims, and who have borne the main brunt, of the destructive policies of the TPLF regime and its paymasters. The second, relatively bigger loss, stemmed from the TPLF's ability to derail and frustrate the positive bilateral and regional all-rounded growth that could have been achieved

through the complimentary resources and capabilities of the Ethiopian and Eritrean peoples. Twenty-seven years is a long interval. The losses incurred and time wasted are thus huge in terms of this yardstick. But as the damage inculcated on the Ethiopian people became increasingly unbearable, it spurred the wrath and a rebellion in the people who said “enough is enough”. This in turn precipitated the end of the TPLF’s shenanigans, which was aptly described as “Game Over”. Ethiopia is now at a turning point or transition. What is the destination? How will this be achieved? These are timely questions that must be raised. But although it will require time and efforts to remove the TPLF’s toxic and malignant legacy and to bring about a congenial climate, the positive direction that has been set in motion is crystal clear.¹⁰

Indeed, as the above quoted speech details, Eritrea’s president unequivocally put the blame on the TPLF – for the lack of any diplomatic progress for two decades before 2018. In this respect, we can see that the most destructive war the two countries fought, the long duration of the conflict, and the absence of substantive attempts to resolve the conflict were all attributable to disagreements between the Tigrayan and Eritrean political elites. Hence, when Ethiopia and its new administration departed from the decades-long political principles that underpinned the TPLF, it became evident that peace at last could become a reality.

The peace agreement between Ethiopia and Eritrea was also a blessing in disguise for the entire Horn of Africa region. Before discussing what the new rapprochement between the two countries brought to the region, however, it is also vital to discuss Ethiopia’s significance to peace and stability in the region. Ethiopia’s significance to the Horn is understated. Given the security challenges in Somalia, the country’s army (an ENDF contingent) remains part of the peace-keeping forces that have contributed to recent gains in stability in the once failed but slowly emerging Somali state (African Union Mission in Somalia 2014). After war broke out between South Sudan and the Sudan because of both countries’ claims to territory in the Abyei region, Ethiopia’s peace-keeping forces have played an all-important role in de-escalating the conflict, and continue to remain a force for stability there (see United Nations 2020).

Importantly, however, after the Abiy-initiated rapprochement with Eritrea concluded with a peace agreement, which eventually earned the premier Ethiopia’s first ever Nobel Peace Prize, for 2019 (see Nobel Prize 2019), not only did the “no war – no peace” status quo between the two countries end, leading to a resumption of people-to-people relations, but it also generated increased stability in the region, as, for the first time in many years, the Eritrean and Djiboutian authorities started promising diplomatic contacts (Reuters 2018a). Moreover, the heads of state and government of Somalia, Eritrea, and Ethiopia have consistently advocated regional economic integration and stability for more than two years now.¹¹

Unfortunately for the region and Ethiopia, however, Ethiopia's domestic instability also posed great challenges for all. The most important of these challenges would become the now isolated TPLF itself. Part of the problem began to resolve itself, though, when Abiy and his allies in the new political administration took steps to reform the EPRDF from a coalition of political parties into a nationally unified party that included the formerly marginalized and ignored groups previously considered the coalition's affiliates in developing regions.

The Prosperity Party: Ethiopia's new political incumbent

The TPLF was now based in Mekele, voicing its opposition to the wide-ranging political reforms being undertaken by the new leaders of the country, which constituted one of the most important accomplishment of those in charge of political change in Ethiopia. The three parties that had made up the EPRDF coalition came together with the other former affiliates of the coalition to establish the Prosperity Party (Yibeltal 2019). The move essentially transformed the TPLF from a coalition partner to a politically isolated opposition group now administering its regional base of Tigray. This political development was significant for many reasons. In an explainer I wrote for Al Jazeera in December 2019, I argue,

Many Ethiopians appear to be pleased with the merger (the emergence of a nationally unified party), seeing it as an opportunity to unite the country and resolve its many deep-rooted problems. Indeed, it is difficult to deny that a pan-Ethiopian party led by people who have ample experience and significant public support has the unprecedented potential to address major challenges like growing ethnic polarization and violence.

(Gedamu 2019)

Certainly, the establishment of the PP, its national appeal, and its inclusive political framework were all groundbreaking for the country. This does not mean, however, that ethnic strife has been curtailed or that meaningful gains on the peace and stability front have been achieved, as unrest has continued to take the country one step backwards for every few steps forwards on the reform front. The TPLF, for its part, has continually accused the new PP-led administration of being a unitarist group, interested in dismantling the federal arrangement that, it argues, had bestowed greater rights on many of the country's ethnic groups. For its part, the PP refutes the accusation by affirming its commitment to the principles of federalism. As we will see later, the PP also continues to accuse the TPLF of sponsoring those bent on conflict and inciting all the violence that has rocked the country since 2018. One major incident, which took the country to the brink of a war, occurred late in the summer of 2020, when the TPLF opposed the postponement of the

general election because of the global pandemic caused by covid. Not only did it oppose the new deadline for the national elections, which were promised for almost a year later, but it made a point of “protecting the constitution” – then turned against the constitutional framework by organizing its own electoral board and managing regional elections in September 2020. The federal government, which declared the polls in Tigray illegal, ignored the entire development, however, for what it said was the sake of ensuring the peace and stability of the country.

The TPLF leadership, determined to oppose the federal government in Addis Ababa yet again, started to take measures that would further enrage the country’s new leaders. Among other things, it had already started to train special paramilitary police forces and militias, while occasionally also orchestrating military parades. Moreover, it dangerously and forcefully limited movements by the Ethiopian National Defense Force from, to, and within the Tigray region at large. For many, therefore, the breakout of war between the TPLF-led Tigray region and the PP-led government in Addis Ababa became just a matter of time.

In early November 2020 the Tigrayan leadership suddenly ordered its special police forces and militia to launch a “pre-emptive and surprise” attack against the unsuspecting Northern Command of the ENDF, which was based in and spread across Tigray, a region it had been protecting since the outbreak of war with Eritrea in 1998. The attack caused unprecedented damage to the ENDF, with many of its soldiers being killed or kidnapped, and the country’s military arsenal was robbed. Abiy Ahmed, in a televised address, told citizens that the country had been attacked and vowed to retaliate with a counter-offensive, which he termed a “law enforcement operation” (Peralta 2020). The conflict would become one of the most consequential events in the country’s contemporary history.

The fall of the TPLF

The conflict in Tigray between the TPLF and the federal government was the most damaging for Ethiopians. At the outset, ethnic Amharas were massacred in their hundreds in the town of Mai Kadra by TPLF forces and youth vigilante groups organized by the local Tigrayan administration for such purposes. Amnesty International’s report reads as follows:

Amnesty International has not yet been able to confirm who was responsible for the killings but has spoken to witnesses who said forces loyal to the Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF) were responsible for the mass killings, apparently after they suffered defeat from the federal ENDF forces. Three people told Amnesty International that survivors of the massacre told them that they were attacked by members of Tigray Special Police Force and other TPLF members.

(Amnesty International 2020a)

One of the independently managed and reformed bodies of the federal government, the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC), also published a report, which corroborated Amnesty's initial report with more detail:

The preliminary report finds that before retreating from the advance of the Ethiopian National Defense Forces (ENDF), the local militia and police security apparatus joined forces with members of the Samri group to carry out door-to-door raids and kill hundreds of people they identified as ethnic "Amharas and Wolkait origin", by beating them with sticks, stabbing them with knives, machetes and hatchets and strangling them with ropes. They also severely injured many people and looted or destroyed properties. Based on testimony gathered so far, EHRC estimates that at least 600 civilians were killed. The death toll could be higher still as there are reports of individuals unaccounted for at the time of EHRC's visit and bodies hidden in fields outside Maikadra. Amidst the harrowing acts of the Tigrayan informal youth group, Samri, survivors also tell many stories of humane actions where other residents also of Ethnic Tigrayan origin, who saved many lives by hiding targets in their homes, in churches and in farms fields.

(EHRC 2020)

Not only was this a humanitarian crisis of a grave nature, as indicated in the above quote, but Tigray region's infrastructure was also damaged; and human suffering in the region and the large-scale displacement of Tigrayans were added to the list of daunting challenges confronting the country. On the war front, however, the reorganized ENDF was able to take control of town after town, and finally defeated the TPLF-led forces, a military operation that is now largely concluded with most of the liberation front's leaders captured or killed (Tadesse 2021). A provisional administration in Tigray was also set up during the conflict, and it is now slowly asserting itself in restoring law and order, though significant challenges remain. The regional administration was also put together after a state of emergency was declared by Ethiopia's parliament, to last for six months. Even though the Tigray region is now slowly returning to normalcy, however, this does not mean that the country's problems are over.

Ethno-nationalism and Ethiopia's remaining challenges

Despite the unceremonious demise of the TPLF as a political force, Ethiopia's political challenges are far from over, or even likely to end any time soon. Organized and fringe political groups that champion the group rights agenda and that were mostly supported by the TPLF still present great challenges. One major political difference that has become apparent through the country's emerging fault lines in the past few decades has been that, instead of seeking national unity and a strong federal government that could ensure freedom for

all by protecting peace and stability, ethno-nationalist groups desire the further creation of more homogeneous regional states. These groups, which call themselves federalist forces, have also been making it clear that their intention is to bring about an Ethiopia that develops into a confederation of states, which is an extreme type of governance system that has no similarity to any form or structure of devolved power in the world today.¹² Such a narrative is indeed one that would perpetuate and intensify the failures of the current fragile ethnic federal system.

What is striking is that the ethno-nationalist groups' insistence on discussing such extreme measures has one clear message, namely the need to maintain the current federal arrangement so as to keep the current divisive political status quo. For example, before the conflict started, TPLF leaders were adamant that their opposition to the administration led by Abiy Ahmed was predicated on protecting the federal system. After the conflict started in northern Ethiopia, however, with the TPLF itself the instigator, the liberation front's leadership changed course in its narrative of justifying the war and made it clear that its intention throughout had been a quest for greater self-determination, indicating that the liberation front, which had been a dominant force in the country for three decades, was all along planning to secede Tigray from Ethiopia in the event that it lost its political dominance at some point. Such a change in its narrative was heavily ironic, given that the TPLF and the EPRDF coalition it had dominated for so long had already declared that self-determination and the promotion of group rights were what they had struggled to achieve and what they had implemented after taking political power back in 1991. But, as I indicated earlier, old habits never die.

As explained throughout Part 2 of this book, Ethiopia's ethnic federal arrangement has failed to achieve its agenda of promoting group rights. Instead, it has made groups antagonistic to each other, caused unprecedented levels of ethnic violence, increased economic inequality and corruption, and led to the massive identity-based displacement of Ethiopians from almost all parts of the country. The situation that has been unfolding in the Benishangul-Gumuz region for the past few years, whereby ethnic Amharas especially were targeted as outsiders to the region regardless of the fact that they are the majority ethnic group there, attests to such a sad reality. Moreover, such ethnic-identity-based attacks are not directed solely against the Amhara but also include massacres of Oromo and Shinasha groups in the region. A recent document published by Amnesty International on December 23, 2020, states,

Amnesty International independently interviewed via phone five survivors of the attack and one official from Bulen District, all of whom described how armed members of the ethnic Gumuz community attacked houses of people from the Amhara, Oromo and Shinasha communities starting from around 5 am this morning. Perpetrators set homes alight and stabbed and shot people ... At least 100 deaths have been reported so far. With dozens still unaccounted for and homes still ablaze, the

death toll is likely to rise and there must be an urgent investigation into this horrendous attack. Perpetrators must be brought to justice and the Ethiopian authorities must make clear that this kind of violence will not be tolerated.

(Amnesty International 2020b)

Hence, notwithstanding the fact that the TPLF might not perhaps pose any significant problems, many challenges and much work still await Ethiopia's ambitious new administration led by Abiy Ahmed and his deputy, and now also foreign minister, Demeke Mekonnen. More importantly, the federal government still needs to assert itself across the country's territories if there is any hope for peace and stability to reign in Ethiopia. Furthermore, healing the nation from what has occurred over the last three decades of ethnic division and polarization remains one of the most important tasks facing the catalysts of the political change that emerged in 2018. Unfortunately, since the major conventional war of November and December 2020, ending in the TPLF's defeat, what remains of the latter has waged guerrilla warfare in lieu of what it did three to four decades ago. Therefore, this new phase of the conflict has put Ethiopia's Tigray in a difficult situation and has forced the country's security forces to be concentrated in the northern part of the country, even though there are still pockets of violence across western Ethiopia that are claiming innocent lives, in particular the Amhara, who have long been targets of ethno-nationalist rebel forces.

Conclusion

The popular protests that emerged in 2018 across the Oromia and Amhara regional states of Ethiopia's fragile federation led to a highly promising new administration, although it remains somewhat insecure regardless of its meaningful success on the reform front. After the military success of the ENDF in north Ethiopia, in part supported by the Amhara and Afar regions' special police forces and militias, which contributed to the demise of the TPLF, the federal government is now faced by the challenge of what it can do to reform the federal arrangement in ways that promote people-to-people relations, regain the trust of the people in Tigray and other regions that had embraced the divisive ethno-nationalist political narratives, and build a federal system that makes it easier to control ethnic violence and protect individual and minorities groups rights altogether without negatively impacting the regional states' rights to administer their own territories in line with the constitution.

Ethiopia has also been experiencing unprecedented levels of regional adversity with regard to its disagreements with downstream states of the Nile river basin, Egypt and Sudan, which consider the Great Ethiopian Renaissance Dam that Ethiopia is building for hydro-electric power generation a major threat to their share of the river's waters. Moreover, the peace

agreement with Eritrea, even though it remains promising to this day, needs also be finalized in practical terms, with open physical borders and the development of full-fledged economic cooperation, such as the use of Eritrea's ports along the Red Sea coast as a primary example. Internally, Abiy Ahmed's Prosperity Party and the federal government are also set to be tested, with the country's national elections now scheduled to be held around the middle of 2021. Making the elections free and fair, ensuring peaceful polling, and allowing the participation of opposition groups without any hindrance would be an achievement that would be evaluated positively in times to come.

Notes

- 1 The interview with this individual from the Amhara political elite (interviewee 70), who is currently serving in the federal government in Addis Ababa, was conducted on December 14, 2018, in Addis Ababa.
- 2 One of the longest discussions I had was with interviewee 71, conducted in Addis Ababa on December 13, 2018.
- 3 In one of the most surprising events in recent years, OPDO declared that what had transpired in the Ethiopia of old was a class operation and not ethnic oppression, which was what the TPLF's political manifestos and propaganda pieces had long been propagating. See Gedamu (2018).
- 4 Abiy Ahmed made the speech in Amharic, the federal government's working language. For the direct translation into English, see OPride.com (2018).
- 5 During this period tens of thousands of political prisoners, individuals who had been jailed because of their participation in the extended protests from 2015 to early 2018, were released. Notable prisoners of conscience were freed, including Andargachew Tsege, who was the leader of a rebel group that had established its base in neighbouring Eritrea.
- 6 The prime minister and the new administration were praised for achieving gender parity within the executive Cabinet. See Getachew (2018).
- 7 For discussions on the topic of *medemer*, see United States Institute of Peace (2020).
- 8 To put the reforms and the broadening of the political space into context, see Badwaza and Temin (2018).
- 9 For a timeline of events in Ethiopia–Eritrea relations, see Maasho (2018).
- 10 For the president's speech, translated from Tigrinya into English, see Madote (2018).
- 11 For more, see Henneberg and Stapel (2020).
- 12 To see a speech made by one of the ideologues of the ethno-nationalist movement, at Mekele University, in Tigray region, watch www.youtube.com/watch?v=gYQU0c_BR_M.

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11 Conclusion

In Part 1 of this work and subsequent chapters, I argued that the debate that centred on individual rights versus group rights was a healthy part of the discussions in the political discourse of the contemporary Ethiopian state. Nonetheless, the fact that the promotion of group rights somehow emerged and was promoted as a “winning idea” later started the path to the creation of winners and losers, and, thus, the violations of rights of individuals and minorities followed. In fact, it’s also true to say that the group rights agenda was not implemented in a way to benefited those it was designed to serve: the diverse ethnic groups in Ethiopia. Yet again, winners and losers were created, paving the way for increasing ethnic conflict as one group blamed the other for whatever happened in the past or present instead of critiquing and protesting against economic and political policies. The institutional solutions established to help that cause, as clearly presented throughout this book, therefore were used to reward regime loyalists and supporters and punish those perceived as opposition figures and critics, as becomes evident from the explanations in Part 2 of the book. As stated in the discussion of the political theory behind the elites’ manipulations of the very institutional solutions they had created for their survivalist agenda, it helped the political elites achieve some degree of political stability, to which they aspired. Most importantly, the mechanisms of co-optation prevalently seen across all levels of the federal structure were very effective tools for authoritarian survival.

Whether ethnic federalism is what actually exists in the Ethiopian state, given the discussions presented in the book, can also be questioned. As we saw in the extensive discussions presented throughout Part 2, the form of federal setting and regional state–central government relations might just be in name only. It is also very important to note, however, that the fact that the regional states have been designed along ethnic lines (regardless of the very small levels of administrative autonomy the regions enjoyed), the issue of rights violations directed against minorities in different regional states (even though addressing the rights issues was the main driver behind this institutional solution), and the fact that such a design was implemented with the impression that it could help the ruling elite’s survivalist ambitions all can also help explain why the system of governance and structure remains embedded

in an ethnic federal setting, and why I argue that it needs to be studied in such a way.

Moreover, even if the discussions might imply that federalism exists in name only and that the centralist party structure is what is evidently there to see, the federal setting must still be considered as the most integral part of understanding contemporary Ethiopian politics in general and our efforts to understand the EPRDF coalition's success in its survivalist ambitions in particular. Ethnic federalism as a system of government structure in the country, therefore, is the enabling mechanism for such an explanation of authoritarian survival. In this respect, in the last substantive chapters of Part 2 of the book, I have addressed how the remaking of the Ethiopian state in the post-1991 political era effectively safeguarded the ruling political elite even from the most pivotal challenges that they had to endure and survive, mainly in the first two decades of their political rule. I have also shown that this was possible as a result of the mechanisms implemented along the federal setting in place, and the party structure and its ability to outmanoeuvre the political structure in general.

To this end, I have presented how the Ethiopian state evolved under the EPRDF's rule and how the regime under this ruling coalition used the country's political history as an important narrative to divide groups and take away their ability to demand political and economic reforms as one nation. In such discussions of the historical narrative, we saw that the emergence of legitimate grievances as a result of political and economic inequality in the past. It remains critical to reiterate, however, that the ruling coalition seized on the fact as providing greater opportunities for exploitation for its survivalist ambitions. The fact that correcting the historical injustices was what led to the emergence of rebellions on the causes of ethnic questions and grievances indeed makes the introduction of the institutional solutions from both political and economic realms less surprising, even though these solutions were quite a departure from the pan-Ethiopian state of the old political regimes. Furthermore, explanations that centre, among other things, on the persistence of political culture in the form of the elite interaction we see throughout the Ethiopian state, the strategic interests of the political elite, and the institutional approaches used by such elites all now matter in equal measure.

From the rights perspective, when looking at how the TPLF-led EPRDF regime utilized what it introduced as an institutional solution to these historically challenging problems through its agenda of promoting group rights, we see that the coalition failed to deliver even its own preset goals. As can be seen in terms of the oppression of individuals and the negative impact on minority rights across the federal setting, the flaws in the electoral landscape, the fact that the line between the bureaucracy and the party structure is highly blurred, and the existence of clientelist systems across all levels of the political spectrum, we can infer that the institutional solution of ethnic federalism also failed to deliver whatever promises it made, at least from the rights perspectives. Instead, what such an institutional solution accomplished

was to reinforce the survivalist approaches of the ruling coalition while the country and its diverse groups remained at cross-purposes. Thus, even in the wake of the political change in 2018, the country's citizens are still attempting to foresee what might unfold in Ethiopia's political future, as the badly written constitution, the institutional and political realities, and the most important debates all remain open questions still seeking critical and genuine responses.

As can be clearly seen from the extended discussions in the chapters presented, the coalition that ruled the nation in the extended post-1991 period effectively utilized the ethnic federal arrangement for its survivalist political strategies. The fact that the TPLF, one member of the ruling coalition, controlled the security apparatus of the state also overshadowed any prospects for real and tangible reforms. As Christopher Clapham explains when talking about how the challenges of the country at large are to be understood:

The deeper problem facing Ethiopia is that it is now too complex and diverse a society to be managed without the extremely adept deployment of the political skills – of discussion, bargaining, compromise and simultaneous recognition of alternative sources of authority – that are needed to create some kind of workable synthesis of the different elements of which it is composed.

(Clapham 2009: 191)

Clapham's observation in fact shows that, unless political dialogues become the norm and the ruling elite from the past and present discuss and agree at least on a minimum list of what the national agenda should be, the challenges facing the country are not going to go away anytime soon. Indeed, Clapham's conclusion is exactly right. Importantly, given the rapidly changing political climate both at home and at the international level, the repercussions of a lack of genuine political reform (even though the political change of the last few years remains promising) could cause further damage. As Ethiopia is now facing much regional and domestic political adversity, the need for political dialogue remains the most crucial undertaking that all political stakeholders need to closely examine. Fortunately, the unreformable EPRDF no longer exists and the TPLF fell in late 2020 in the conflict it had started against the federal government led by the Prosperity Party, born in December 2019.

Regardless, it is also vital to reiterate that the Ethiopian state remains poor and unequal, and its highly polarized and ethnocentric political sphere resembles a ticking time bomb that endangers the future of the country unless the most needed reforms, some already started by Prosperity Party, are fully realized and there is a renewed commitment to democratization within a strong constitutional framework that treats everyone with respect and dignity. Moreover, new developments that are now challenging the viability of the federal model, mostly concerning the evolving questions of identity and demands for equality and fairness heard across the Amhara, Southern, and a few other regions, should be resolved once and for all. And these possible

solutions should also indicate broader future policy prescriptions for the future of the federal model itself. How such developments play out will have a great bearing on how comparative politics researchers will look at the Ethiopian case moving forward, as the new challenges, which will probably have far-reaching consequences, are yet to be determined.

Recent political developments also present two important junctures in the current state of politics in the country, however, and this should not be overlooked. First, the ethnic federal arrangement and the subsequent emergence of the institutional machinations of the EPRDF elite succeeded in terms of the coalition's survivalist goals. In this regard, it is also difficult to deny that such a federal solution did indeed create some level of stability for most of the EPRDF's years, even though, sadly, it also delivered the authoritarian survival ambitions – until it was no longer able to. Second, however, it is now clear that the diverse groups in the country (especially the Amhara and Oromo) and the ruling elite both understood that this status quo was not sustainable, but their solutions to the country's problems remain diametrically opposed to each other. And the conclusion therefore becomes that the regime's understanding of the problems within the federal setting, and the possible expected re-emergence of questions of political and economic inequality and of identity, requires the need to adopt new and creative political solutions. Unfortunately, just as this was the advice to the former elites within the EPRDF coalition, today's incumbents, in the shape of the Prosperity Party, must also heed the call to construct a level playing field in the political and economic spheres of the country alike. Moreover, the military's involvement – indeed, the vital role it played in the economy in the past – and its visible failures indicate that the current political administration should recognize that the age-old failed political and economic policies must be redesigned and that new institutional frameworks need to be introduced to usher in a new era of equality.

In general, unless equal levels of representation across the political landscape emerge and unless citizens – whether belonging to the majority groups of the Amhara and Oromo or minorities across the nation – feel part of the ownership of the state, the domination of one political or ethnic group over most others would be a repeat of what has already been tried under the EPRDF, which is unsustainable in the long term and inimical to the existence of a cohesive state. Now that the EPRDF is gone, despite its survival for some 28 years, the absence of genuine reforms or the lack of continuity in the reform agenda of the last two or three years could continue to leave traces of issues that further endanger the existence of the second most populous nation in the whole of Africa.

Overall, this book contributes to our understanding of two crucial points. First, through the use of comparative historical analysis across time, it shows how the persistence of political culture, in terms of patterns of interaction among the political elite across different regimes, explain the continuity of clientelist and survivalist regime types in Ethiopia. Through the primary information, collected via tens of interviews, and secondary data, it also elucidates

that how the ethnic federal arrangement as an institutional solution evolved in the post-1991 Ethiopian state ensured some level of political stability and political survival to the very elite that designed the said institutional solution. Such were, of course, the goals of the project. Second, however, the main contribution of this work becomes the conclusion that, given that the ethnic federal attempts from various historical cases were shown to have emerged not for the ideals of democratic promotion, the question then centres on how this institutional solution might help us understand authoritarian survival, which this book has achieved. Nonetheless, it also came at a cost, as ethnic tensions, violence, the displacement of people, and difficulties in labor and people's mobility are still witnessed as a result of the current system. Moreover, the discussions at the end of the book also indicate that the new political developments that have now emerged are worthy of extended study and close follow-ups, which could even lead to the need to include Part 3, of discussions of contemporary Ethiopian politics, in another future project.

I must also address the limitations of this book as well. Recall that the introduction to this project mentioned the many attributes that many of the sub-Saharan African states share. The addition of some other federal and unitary states for comparison purposes might therefore have helped our broader understanding of authoritarian survival in Africa. Therefore, this could be another path that might have to be explored in future projects. Besides the diverse qualitative methodological avenues used in the book, I also believe that some use of quantitative data in political violence, institutional efficiency, and other topics such as democratic development could have helped in bringing to our attention some of the impacts of the political and economic solutions provided via institutional creations such as the ethnic federal setting, and other political and economic programmes, at least in Ethiopia under the TPLF-led EPRDF coalition.

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